

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have petitions to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These petitions come from the Debden, Big River area of the province, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To present petitions as well.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by individuals from the Redvers, Antler, Alida, Fertile, Carievale, Storthoaks area.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The communities, Mr. Speaker, involved are Weyburn and Midale. I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — I too rise to present petitions on the same issue, and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

And as in duty bound, we will ever pray.

And these come from the good people at Weyburn and McTaggart.

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, I too rise to present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens. The issues in the petition are about the severance payments to Mr. Jack Messer and the call for an independent public inquiry into all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities around Archerwill, Kelvington, Porcupine Plain, Greenwater Lake, Chelan, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition to present today from people in the Englefeld area:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Thank you.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I as well have a petition to present on behalf of Saskatchewan residents. It surrounds the whole issue of Jack Messer and the Channel Lake situation. The petitioners come from the Naicam area of Saskatchewan and I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition on behalf of people concerned about the closure of the Plains Health Centre:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And the signatures on this petition are all from the constituency of Regina South.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition today. The prayer of relief reads as follows:

Your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains hospital by enacting legislation to prevent its closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

Your petitioners come from Edenwold and Pilot Butte. I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I bring petitions as well from people throughout the province concerned with the Plains hospital closure. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed the petition are from Climax, Bracken, Shaunavon area of the province. I so present.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to present the petitions today with the following prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to reach necessary agreements with other levels of government to fund the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan so that work can begin in 1998, and to set out a time frame for the ultimate completion of the project with or without federal assistance.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These, Mr. Speaker, mostly come from the community of Piapot, but there are a few from Flaxcombe, Maple Creek, and Swift Current as well. And I'm happy to present them on behalf of all of those people today.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly regarding the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway; saving the Plains Health Centre; and cancelling severance payments to Jack Messer.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question:

As of March 31, 1997 the reported accumulated deficit in the summary financial statements was \$9.3 billion; what is the forecasted accumulated deficit as of March 31, 1998; and what is the forecasted accumulated deficit for March 31, 1999?

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question:

(1) How many cases of tuberculosis were reported in Saskatchewan in 1990; (2) how many people died from tuberculosis that year; (3) how many of the reported cases were children and youth under the age of 21; and (4) how many of those children and youth died from tuberculosis that year?

I will also be submitting similar questions for the years 1991

through 1997. I so present.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question, mainly of the minister of Liquor and Gaming:

What plans does your government have to comply with the request for exemptions from requirements such as 4(a) and 4(f) of the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority, all licensed raffles and lotteries having a total prize value of \$1,000 or less in the province?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all my colleagues in the Assembly, family that is very near to my heart, if not in miles.

My family comes from Canmore to be with us for the Easter vacation. We've had an opportunity to dine together and I would like to introduce them. They're sitting in the top row of your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

It's my youngest brother, Steve; his wife, Wanda; son, Jonah; and daughter Lacie. The Söder-Munholland family, Mr. Speaker, also are joined by a nephew today, little Mitchell.

I'd ask all members to join with me in a warm welcome to them this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Johnson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly, four people from the constituency of Shellbrook-Spiritwood, actually from the community of Spiritwood. They are here on business in Regina. They're the manager and board members of the Spiritwood Credit Union — Karl Kajner, Brad Brataschuk, Mitchel Valette, and Warner Kabatoff.

I'd like you and members of the Assembly to welcome them here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to introduce to you and the members of the Assembly, seated in your gallery today, Mr. Darren Berg from The Battlefords Health District who works in the field of dental health education.

I had the privilege of meeting Darren at a convention last fall in Prince Albert. And from my experience he is someone who knows a great deal about dental hygiene.

With Darren today is Leslie Topola, who also works in the field of dental health education in the Saskatoon Health District. They'll be viewing the proceedings of the House today and I'm going to be meeting with them later this afternoon.

So I'd ask them to stand and ask the House to welcome them to the Assembly this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Economic Development in the North-east

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I heard the member from Melfort-Tisdale on Saturday stumping his way after the leadership of the Tory Party — and I know it is the Tory Party because all three candidates sounded exactly like Grant Devine — the member said that if pigs could fly and he were the Premier, he would cut the Department of Economic Development, the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation, and Tourism Saskatchewan.

Here's what he would do to his own constituency. First, the small business loans association program of the Economic Development department encourages community development through non-traditional entrepreneurs. In Melfort, six small business loans have created 200 jobs — that's 200 jobs gone under the new premier.

Also gone is the Eden REDA (regional economic development authority) and its \$60,000 to promote local development. Tourism is the fifth largest employer in the Melfort-Tisdale constituency. Visitors spend over \$9 million a year — visitors attracted with the help of Tourism Saskatchewan, which would be gone.

SOCO (Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation) provided a repayable loan which supports seven jobs in Tisdale. That's at least 207 jobs and \$9 million that would be lost in a sink-hole of discredited Tory ideology, spouted by the member from Melfort-Tisdale.

Old dogs, old tricks.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Wadena Conservation Officer Wins Award

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, conservation officers play a vital role in preserving our natural resources. Today it gives me great pleasure to recognize Conservation Officer Marty Halpape, a constituent from Wadena, who was recently awarded the Al Stark Award.

This award is given by SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) on a yearly basis to the conservation officer who best displays knowledge and dedication in protecting the natural resources of Saskatchewan as well as providing community awareness and conservation enforcement. Mr. Halpape is active on several government boards throughout his job. Mr. Halpape is also active within his community, serving as a school trustee and a volunteer for many of Wadena's annual events.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to join with me in thanking Mr. Halpape for his dedication to his job and to Saskatchewan natural resources.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Royal Canadian Mounted Police Building Opens in Biggar

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police force is one of the longest and proudest traditions in this province and in our country. It has given us pride in its integrity and confidence in having fair and good order in our communities.

Biggar is particularly proud and confident in its future today because of a new RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) facility for their town. The grand opening, which I was privileged to attend on January 23, 1998, marked the culmination of months of hard work in planning the building. But more importantly, it marked a significant new effort of the RCMP and many members of the community to bring to life the idea of community-based policing.

The Biggar detachment will be more accessible to individuals in the community and will work with the residents to achieve safer homes and ultimately safer communities. The Biggar detachment has made great strides in emphasizing that it works in common cause with the people of Biggar.

I would like to extend my congratulations to the members of the Biggar detachment and to all of those individuals who contributed in the planning and promotion of the new headquarters. Biggar, one more time, is leading in the development of innovative services to the people of rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government continues to support the closure of one of our newest and largest hospitals in the province and move in a large number of administrative offices and a few classrooms. Fewer beds, fewer nurses; more desks, more bureaucrats.

The Premier's hand-picked friend who chairs the Regina Health Board wrote publicly that one reason they are closing this hospital is because it is nearly a quarter of a century old. Well, Mr. Speaker, our Premier has been in politics over a quarter of a century as well. Perhaps he's outdated also.

The people of Saskatchewan are not going to take this. They are not going to accept this; they will stand up and be heard. Myself and my colleagues are starting a large public campaign to stop the closure of the Plains. Mr. Speaker, the fight to save the Plains will start tonight in Assiniboia. I say to everyone: if you really care, be there.

Waterfront Press Wins Awards

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new *Waterfront Press* of Lumsden in my constituency has recently been awarded ... recognized with two awards: the 1997 General Excellence Award for the best all-around weekly newspaper, and the second place award for best front page in Saskatchewan were given to *Waterfront Press* co-publisher, Jacqueline Chouinard, at the Weekly Newspapers Association's winter

workshop at the end of February at the Sheraton Cavalier in Saskatoon.

One judge commented: "It is evident throughout this paper the great deal of community involvement this publication has." Co-editors and publishers, Lucien and Jacqueline Chouniard said:

This is indeed an honour for us. We didn't expect to win such a prestigious award after only being in this industry for three years. Much of the credit goes to our staff, reporters, writers, and the people in the communities we serve. The judges were bang on when they said that we have a great deal of community involvement. In our opinion that's the key to the success of any weekly newspaper. We're lucky. Without the community getting involved, this just wouldn't have happened.

Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased that people at the *Waterfront Press* are dedicated to the communities they serve so capably, and I am proud of the *Waterfront's* accomplishment. I would also like to extend my best wishes and good luck to the new *Waterfront Press* as they compete at the Canadian Community Newspapers Association competition in July.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Privacy for Montgomery Family

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of comments made in this House yesterday, I have been asked to make some comments on behalf of a constituent of mine, Valerie Montgomery-Bull. She has asked me to say that the personal tragedy of her family has been compounded by the fact that it is, of necessity, being played out in the public eye.

Last Thursday she and I had a private meeting with the Minister of Social Services and she wants me to tell this House that that meeting was appreciated.

It is also her hope to attend as a witness before the joint parliamentary committee on justice looking into amendments to the Young Offenders Act.

Of course there is a trial of two young people to take place in the near future. It is her wish that these proceedings be allowed to go ahead without political interference and that she and her family be allowed to grieve and heal in private, away from the spotlight of public glare.

I ask that all members of this House extend to the Montgomery family their best wishes and prayers at this difficult time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Northern Business Forum

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Saskatchewan we all know that northern Saskatchewan is the last, best-kept tourism secret in North America. Its natural, unspoiled beauty, its cultural tradition, and its sports opportunities make it a place

of tremendous potential.

I am happy to announce that yesterday, today, and tomorrow in La Ronge, a business forum is taking place which will help Northerners explore the possibility of northern tourism and other business opportunities. It is the second annual Northern Saskatchewan Business Opportunity Forum and it is being hosted by Jim Brady Development Corporation, the Northern Shores and Northwest Calling Regional Tourism Association, and by Saskatchewan Northern Affairs.

Last year more than 250 participants attended the presentation and workshop. Workshops and seminars will deal with environmental tourism, training and marketing skills, and there will be a number of exhibits at this valuable forum. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to read a letter and I'm going to send copies across to some of the members opposite.

From the RM (rural municipality) of Edenwold, dated March 20, 1998. It's to the board of directors of the Regina Health District.

Dear Sir: On behalf of council and the 2,700 residents in the rural municipality of Edenwold No. 158, this is to advise that we support the efforts being undertaken to prevent the closure of the Plains Health Centre. The Plains Health Centre provides essential services to the residents of southern Saskatchewan and it is easily accessible for emergency personnel and trauma victims. The services provided at the Plains cannot be absorbed by the remaining hospitals without being detrimental to the health care and well-being of the residents of southern Saskatchewan.

Decisions can be reversed. As taxpayers who have a vital interest in the provincial health care system, we hereby request that the Plains Health Centre be maintained as the facility it was designed to be.

In view of the foregoing we hereby request that the decision for the closure of the Plains Health Centre be reversed. Yours truly, Donna Strudwick, the administrator of the RM of Edenwold.

And I'd like to send copies across to the Minister of Health and the Premier.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Inquiry into Channel Lake

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are for the Premier. Mr. Premier, everyone in Saskatchewan now sees what a joke your little NDP (New Democratic Party) show trial really is. Your people on the committee are so incompetent that they can't even run the little

whitewash that you want them to. The whole thing now is on hold because the NDP Chair doesn't know what she's doing. It's no wonder . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now I know that the hon. member will recognize that it is contrary to parliamentary debate to draw into question, in debate, the actions of a presiding officer and I'll ask him to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Boyd: — I withdraw that remark, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Premier, the hearings are a joke and all of Saskatchewan realizes that. It doesn't seem to be going all that well there for you; the little phoney-baloney Crown Corporation hearings we are seeing are a complete failure. Will you do the right thing for Saskatchewan people, call a public inquiry, and put the Channel Lake investigation into the hands of some competent people outside of your committee instead of the bumbling committee that's there?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite and to the member opposite through you, Mr. Speaker, that this personal attack on the Chair of the Crown Corporations Committee, who is a private member . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now the minister will recognize as well that it's out of order to be commenting on a ruling of the Chair. The Chair has just ruled on that matter and I'll ask the minister to continue with his response.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite through you that I think he should be ashamed of himself with the approach that he has brought to the committee. The fact of the matter is the committee, I think according to all other members except the members from that caucus, who went there with the intent not to make it work but make it fail, as described by the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee that that committee was a kangaroo court, you're now trying to attempt to make this committee non-functional. And I say to the member opposite that if you believe that your performance on the committee is so bad, you should substitute yourself and get someone else to come who has the capability and the creditability to carry on the duties as a member on that committee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, you referred this matter to the Crown Corporations Committee for a political solution but you and your NDP members are clearly incapable of handling the job. First they try to ram through a witness list approved by no one but the NDP, then they start the hearings before even one document has been provided to the committee. Then you give Jack Messer a free lawyer and then you yank him away from him, causing another delay.

If this is how the NDP runs things it's no wonder . . . it's a wonder you didn't lose even more money on Channel Lake. Mr. Premier, this investigation is a joke. It's being ground to a halt by NDP incompetence. When are you going to do the right thing for Saskatchewan and call the public inquiry that

everyone's asking for?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite it's my understanding, in consulting with some of our members, that there was an unanimous decision. All members agreed to adjourn today. All of your members agreed to the adjournment. And to come here today, and to come here today and falsely — falsely — try to indicate that you wanted to stay there and work is the height of absurdity.

And I say to the members opposite, I say to the members opposite who don't believe in the process any more than the Grant Devine government believed in process when they avoided the committees of the legislature . . . Crown Corporations was two or three years behind in reviewing the Crown corporations' annual reports when they were defeated in 1991. You tie yourself very closely to the Devine administration by your approach to the workings of this committee and trying to achieve to disrupt the workings of this committee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The committee meeting this morning was adjourned because the committee was not ready to do the work. There was no witness list. There were no documents that have been asked for time and time again. Jack Messer was not able to come up with a lawyer. Those were the reasons the committee hearings this morning were denied.

Mr. Premier, this morning we heard another example of brilliant NDP management. Jack Messer, Mr. Speaker, Jack Messer was the president of a multimillion dollar company for seven years and in that entire time he never had a written contract. It's no wonder the guy never reads the contracts to do with Channel Lake — he didn't even have to read his own contract.

Mr. Premier, is this any way to run a professional civil service, hiring a CEO (chief executive officer) without a written contract? Jack Messer's position at SaskPower had nothing to do with good management and it had everything to do with patronage and cronyism and paying off your old NDP friends. And it continues today with people like Don Ching and Gordon Nystuen.

The Speaker: — Order. The hon. member has been extremely prolonged in his preamble. I'll ask him to go directly to his question.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Premier, can you explain why Jack Messer never had a written contract? And how then did you decide on his severance package if he never had a written contract to base it on?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite that was a heck of good speech you just gave. And it almost sounds like you are a frustrated potential leader of the Conservative Party trying to get a campaign going. And with the lack of, Mr. Speaker, with the lack of support for the other three running, I suppose there is a chance that there will be a write-in on the ballot. But I would urge you not to use this committee to try to run a political campaign, which is what you're trying to do.

You and the member from Melfort are trying to achieve through this committee what you failed to do out on the hustings — that is to get something going for your leadership campaign.

I say to the members opposite, come tomorrow to the committee. The committee is working as it should. There's procedural issues to deal with.

But I'm sure at the end of the day if you do your work and the members in the Liberal caucus do their work — members of our caucus are committed — come and do your work and all of the issues you want to raise will be dealt with.

And I want to say before I close, in the din that's occurring . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Next question.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, simply, why did Jack Messer never have a written contract? And because he didn't have a written contract, what did you use as a basis for his severance package?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I say again to the member opposite, the statement that I made in the House earlier about Milt Fair working with legal counsel to determine the severance, still stands.

But what is new information is the Crown Corporation minute that I was just handed, on page 692 that says, the member from Melfort, and I quote: "Because I think what Mr. Messer is asking for is completely reasonable and I am dismayed . . ." blah, blah, blah.

He finds it totally reasonable, he finds it totally reasonable, and you, sir, say that the adjournment today wasn't in order. Why don't you two caucus and get your lines straightened out. I know you're not supporting Mr. Gantefoer for the leadership but . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I know the hon. minister will recognize — order! — I know the hon. minister will recognize that we're not to use proper names in debate in the Assembly but to only refer to members in the context of the roles that they serve in this House. I'll ask the minister to conclude his answer very, very briefly.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The individual I was referring to is the member from Melfort and he clearly indicates that waiting for Mr. Messer to get his documents together is perfectly reasonable. And why you are so upset, and why you are so upset, why are you are so upset and yell from your seat, yell like a banshee from your seat, is unknown.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's really difficult to speak in the House when you allow the yelling and hollering to carry on.

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ambulance Fees

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. I ask this question on behalf of a constituent of mine, Lloyd Nicol from Bredenbury. Because of chronic health problems, Mr. Nicol has been forced to travel to Regina by ambulance three times in the last four months, and ambulance costs have ran up to about \$3,120.

Mr. Minister, I think you'll agree this is an excessive sum of money. You rant and rave about the wonderful health care system, but every day it fails people like Lloyd Nicol. The NDP has created a two-tier system, and actually it's a multi-tier system — one for urban, one for rural, one for the people who can afford to leave Saskatchewan for services, and one for those that can't; one for people forced to pay 3 to \$4,000 in ambulance fees, and one for everybody else.

My question is this: how can you deny that we don't have a multi-tier system when people must pay such astronomical ambulance fees?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member knows that in this province full ambulance services have never been covered, and that's the case across the country. And when the member opposite stands up and talks about two-tiered health care system, I want to remind the member opposite of what his . . . what one of his leaders is talking about, Mr. Hermanson.

And if Mr. Hermanson ends up being the new leader of the new Tory Party, this is what Mr. Hermanson is saying about two-tiered health care system. He says, Hermanson says that he won't promise health care premiums or user fees but what he would look at doing is he would have . . . raise additional revenues in the health care system by removing some of the procedures for life-threatening illnesses and health procedures.

Now that says, Mr. Speaker, that what we'll see is those people today who are sitting on elective surgeries, those people who are sitting on elective surgeries will see user fees, health care costs for things like hip surgery, knee replacements.

That's what Mr. Hermanson talks about. User fees for the sick and ill in Saskatchewan. That's where Mr. Hermanson is going if he's the leader of the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister missed part of my comments because two-tiered would be bad enough; we're talking multi-tiered in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Nicol wanted me to mention also that each of the times he was treated at the Plains Health Centre and couldn't have been more pleased with the care he received. Yet you're closing the Plains and adding another 20 or 30 minutes to people like Mr. Nicol's next ambulance trip.

Mr. Minister, since your government has come to power, you've closed 52 rural hospitals and now you are closing the hospital designed to serve rural people in southern

Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, what are you going to do to address the expensive ambulance rides that are only going to get larger after the Plains closes? What are you going to do to improve emergency services in places like Yorkton so that patients can start to receive emergency services in smaller centres and save the ambulance cost?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that as he and I both know, being neighbours from the same part of Saskatchewan, that it's important for us to have in the province, good, strong health care system that is in many cases where specialized services are centrally located. And the result of that will mean that people from his constituency and mine, which are neighbours, will need to come to Regina for some of those specialized services. That has always been the case. And we'll continue to see that happen into the future, Mr. Speaker.

But what does the member opposite say and his leader say? Now the member opposite, who's real comfortable now that he's returned home to the Tory Party again, is really comfortable, real comfortable with Mr. Huyghebaert. What does Mr. Huyghebaert say here? Mr. Huyghebaert says, Mr. Speaker, that people who require medical . . . in the medical community that there is enough money in the health care system today, is what Mr. Huyghebaert says.

But what he also goes on to say is that if he becomes the leader of the new Tory Party we will see user fees — health care premiums and user fees for Saskatchewan people. That's what the member from Saltcoats believes in. That's what his leadership believe in.

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care Services

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses has reported 20 cases of patient care being compromised in Regina in the past month because of understaffing. In rural communities the situation is no different.

We received a call today from Joanne Johnston who's husband, already a victim of two heart attacks, was brought into the Redvers hospital with chest pains. After more than an hour of watching the nurses being run off their feet, she took it upon herself to put a heart monitor on her husband. Joanne says this is not the fault of the nurses. She knows they're overworked, and she knows it's the fault of your government.

My question is to the Minister of Health. What level has our health care system sunk, when family members are forced to hook up a loved one to a heart monitor?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say that from time

to time in this province we ensure that we provide significant services to enrich the quality of care that people have. And on occasion, Mr. Speaker, we have individuals who have the ability to assist within the health care system to provide those kinds of services that the member opposite talks about.

Now I think what's important here is that we need to look at the information that's provided by the Liberal caucus. Because over the last couple of weeks the Liberal caucus has provided all sorts of information to this House which hasn't been anywhere near the mark, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the member opposite, the Liberals opposite, talked about the fact that there were insufficient number of beds available, and we highlighted that there were 11 beds that were available to the system yesterday.

The member opposite talks today about there not being enough heart services . . . (inaudible) . . . cardiology services available. This week alone, this weekend alone in Regina there were six more heart surgeries performed than on the average — six more heart surgeries than on the average. In this province, Mr. Speaker, we are providing some of the best health care services anywhere in the country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the members opposite respond to these questions, one would have to ask why it's each and every day we can bring personal cases that aren't getting health care in this province. Should be ashamed.

Mr. Speaker, the Redvers hospital has 18 beds and Joanne's husband was fortunate they weren't filled with patients when he was admitted yesterday. But today there are more patients than beds and he was told to go home. As I speak, he is lying down on his living room sofa; he has already experienced two heart attacks and fears a third is on the way.

Mr. Minister, your version of health care may be economical but it's not safe. What is it going to take to convince you that your government has crossed the line?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, in this province today we're providing services on a daily basis to about 35,000 people — 35,000 people every day access the health care system somewhere. And from time to time we're going to see an experience where somebody doesn't receive its fullest kind of service that they might wish. That's true. On an occasion that may happen.

But I want to tell the member opposite that he just finished saying to the House and to the people of Saskatchewan that this individual was discharged home from a health care centre. If this individual was discharged home from a health care centre, clearly he had the opportunity to visit and see a physician.

Now if the member opposite is telling me that he is a politician, who has no medical training at all, and is able to say to this House and to the people of Saskatchewan — because I have no medical information . . . or no medical training either — and a physician tells this individual to go home and convalesce there because he thinks it's safe, how is it that the member opposite

thinks that he has the better sense of what this individual needs, who has no knowledge of the health care system because he has no professional knowledge of that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, clearly what the minister isn't accepting, and the Premier isn't accepting, is that there are no beds for these people. They're not asking to be kicked out immediately after surgery, but that's what you're doing.

Mr. Speaker, following question period yesterday, the Minister of Health told the media that, and I quote: "It's my sense that we can't make decisions around what our moral obligations are." That's what you said yesterday.

Mr. Minister, you just heard how the health care system is not meeting the needs of the people in the cities and the rural areas. Do you not have a moral obligation to ensure that our health care system meets the needs of the residents of this province?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I sense that the member opposite just needs to pay some attention to what's happening in his own constituency. Just recently he and I were at the opening of the new Ponteix health care centre, of which the district health board members there applauded, Mr. Speaker, the wonderful health care service that they have in their community today — applauded it, Mr. Speaker. And today across the province . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — And today across the province, Mr. Speaker, we're providing more money for emergency health care services. We're providing more home care services than we ever did. We're providing more financial assistance to health care than we ever did, Mr. Speaker, and more services today than we ever have.

Mr. Speaker, we have not received one penny — one penny — from the federal government to assist us with the delivery of our services. And I would ask the member opposite and his leader to table in this House the letters that you have written to Ottawa — table in this House that you've written to Ottawa — asking for some additional financial assistance to deliver health services in the province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower Natural Gas Contract

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, my question is about Channel Lake but it has nothing to do with the work of the Crown Corporation Committee.

Mr. Speaker, the bleeding hasn't stopped. It's going to go on for another 10 years. SaskPower has signed a 10-year exclusive contract with Direct Energy Marketing Limited. These guys, and not SaskEnergy, will supply SaskPower with its natural gas for the next 10 years. There's a lot of unease about dealing with the same people who hoodwinked us out of \$5 million in the middle of the night.

Mr. Minister, how comfortable are you in dealing with the same people that you say tricked us out of over \$5 million? Do you really want to go on for the next 10 years dealing with Portigal and Direct Energy?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, as indicated in the House about four weeks ago, — I guess three weeks ago now — the 10-year contract that was signed was brought here to the legislature. We reported on it in the report I gave to the legislature. The member opposite may have not been here while we debated it at the time. But we indicated at that point that the report from SaskPower and in the Deloitte Touche report, if you care to read the document that deals with the 10-year contract, that it appears to be at a commercial rate and one that will work, in fact, for the Power Corporation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Well at first glance it appeared that the sale of Channel Lake was to our interest too, but something happened to that at the last minute. We want something more to assure us that this isn't a sweetheart deal. We know that the 10-year supply contract was integral in the sale of Channel Lake and the sale would not have gone through otherwise. If this is a sweetheart deal then in point of fact we're getting a lot less than 15 million for Channel Lake.

What independent assurance can you give us that the terms of this contract are a fair market deal, that it is preferable for us to deal with Direct Energy as opposed to our own sister Crown corporation of SaskEnergy. Will you table this contract. Why do you feel more bound to this contract than you did to the contracts of the farmers of this province over GRIP (gross revenue insurance program)? You tore those up.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that when the officials from SaskPower appear before the committee, those individuals involved in the sale and purchase of Channel Lake, part of that agreement dealt with the 10-year contract. In the Deloitte & Touche report it speaks to the issue. And a question you may ask of those officials and the consulting company that did the review, are those exact questions that you put.

From the report that I get from SaskPower and SaskPower officials and the Vice-Chair of the board of directors, Mr. Milt Fair, is their review is in fact concluded that this is a fair and equitable arrangement. But having said that, if your review which you will be doing in Crown Corporations Committee find something different, I would be very interested in that at that point.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Welfare Rates

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this morning's *Leader-Post* contains some really shocking statistics on this government's so-called child action plan. This article states that in 1997 there were 34,000 children living in poverty in Saskatchewan, a child welfare rate higher than every

province except Ontario. It also states that there were 79,700 people on welfare in the province, and that's a 17 per cent increase from 1993 when the child action plan began.

Mr. Speaker, 8 per cent of Saskatchewan's total population is on welfare. From day one this administration has been boasting about how it has turned the province around. Well these numbers show how hollow that claim is and how shallow the NDP government's social and economic qualities are.

Will the Minister of Social Services admit that the economic and social policies of this administration have been an abject failure?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question because I'm pleased to have this opportunity to identify for all members the case-load situation in the province of Saskatchewan in terms of our welfare numbers.

Mr. Speaker, the member will know, because I've explained it to her before, that in 1993 the federal Liberal government, by unilaterally transferring aboriginal people off reserve to the provincial rolls, added 10,000 people to our welfare case-load, Mr. Speaker — 10,000 people were added on by the federal Liberals.

Now since that time, Mr. Speaker, we've worked hard restoring the economy of this province, providing social programing that's effective. And I'll tell you what's happening, Mr. Speaker, the welfare case-load is on a steady, steady decline.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, if we compare this February, our latest reporting date, from February a year ago, the welfare case-load is down another 8 per cent, a full 8 per cent down. Mr. Speaker, we're on the right track.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I've heard the comment before in the House earlier today — blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Mr. Minister, your response to an intolerable and a worsening welfare situation is belated and it is meagre. It is one thing, Mr. Minister, to increase funding to welfare recipients under the unemployment . . . or the employment supplement program in the hope of getting them into the workforce. However, everyone knows the climate for growth in Saskatchewan leaves much to be desired. Otherwise, why would 1,700 more people leave this province in the first nine months of 1997 than moved in from other provinces? And these 1,700 were the young and the educated and trained — our future.

Mr. Minister, if your government does not soon see the light and encourage wealth creation through lower taxes, lower utility rates, and the lessening of regulatory burden, the "building independence" strategy will be no more effective than the child action plan.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order, order. Order.

Order, order. The hon. — order! — the hon. member has been extremely long in her preamble and I'll ask her to put her question directly now.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, would you rather see the growth of poverty in the province or the growth of work for our people? If so, I think you had better change your policies pretty quickly.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, not only would I like to see opportunities and jobs for Saskatchewan people, I'm seeing them, Mr. Minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, we have today in the province of Saskatchewan more people working on a daily basis, getting out of bed, going to work, than we've ever had in the history of the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And, Mr. Speaker, just by the way, a good percentage of them are in that member's own constituency. And I tell you, Mr. Speaker, are we satisfied, are we satisfied with perhaps almost the lowest unemployment rate in the country? Are we satisfied with the third lowest dependency rate on social welfare? Are we satisfied that our welfare rolls have declined 8 per cent in the last year?

The answer is no, Mr. Speaker, and we've taken . . . where in the last two weeks, Mr. Speaker, we have taken dramatic steps to reform the welfare system in this province, to provide the child action plan. Just yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I announced to . . . on behalf of the government, that the child action plan in this province has grown from a total of \$4.4 million in '94-95 to a total of \$53 million in this budget . . . (inaudible) . . . Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that is progress for people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Firearms Act Regulations

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, on March 26 the federal Justice minister released a 140-page document containing the final set of regulations under the federal Firearms Act, Bill C-68. The Government of Saskatchewan is very concerned about the lack of respect that the federal government is showing to the Alberta Court of Appeal by forging ahead, announcing yet another set of regulations under Bill C-68 in advance of the decision of the Alberta Court of Appeal.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is one of six provincial and territorial governments that are challenging the federal gun registration legislation in a reference to the Alberta Court of Appeal. We expect a decision very soon; however it would appear that the federal government intends to go ahead with the implementation of their legislation without waiting for the decision of the court.

And like all Canadian citizens, Mr. Speaker, the people of

Saskatchewan are being kept in the dark about how gun registration under Bill C-68 will be administered and what it will cost. About six weeks ago the federal Minister of Justice said the federal government had spent \$34.3 million to date on developing the gun registration program and its communication strategy. To date not a single gun has been registered.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, other federal departments may be involved. How much has been spent by Canada Customs and Foreign Affairs, for example, to plan the implementation? What are the costs to date, in those provinces and territories that continue to be party to the Bill C-68 scheme. The federal government should come clean with the total amount spent by all departments and with the total projected costs of this program.

As well, Mr. Speaker, we are told that the RCMP have been selected to deliver the gun registration program. This government wants to know how much the RCMP have spent on the analysis of this project and on the negotiations with the federal government.

We have other questions, Mr. Speaker. How far will a gun owner have to travel to a firearms office under the new program? What help will be available to complete the myriad of forms that will be required? And most importantly, how much more will the federal government spend before the program is up and running?

Mr. Speaker, the federal government has not presented the people of Canada with a detailed picture of what they are getting for their tax dollars. And, Mr. Speaker, if the court determines that gun registration is, as our government has maintained, an area of provincial authority, then all the expenditures made by the federal government are for nothing — a waste of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure you that our stand on this important issue has not changed. I reiterate, Mr. Speaker, that in September 1996 I said that the Government of Saskatchewan would not be involved in the development of the Bill C-68 regulations and we have not. We remain opposed to the federal government proposal to put a new gun registration program in place.

We have advised the federal government that the province of Saskatchewan will not participate in any way in the administration of the gun registration program under Bill C-68. It is and will remain a federal responsibility, and that means, Mr. Speaker, that it'll be up to the federal government to implement this system on their own. And most importantly, the federal government will have to pay the bills on their own and the cost will be enormous.

The province of Saskatchewan will continue to work with other provinces and territories as we await the decision of the Alberta Court of Appeal. Our government has informed the federal government of our position on Bill C-68, and I assure the people of Saskatchewan and the members of this Assembly that we have no intention of changing our position. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for his words of support for the firearms community. I certainly hope that his government and he will continue to provide the support that they did prior to the last provincial election.

And I'm pleased to note that this House stood firm against C-68 since I introduced the first motion against C-68 in this Assembly in 1994.

This is not the first time, Mr. Speaker, that regulations have been presented by the Ottawa Liberals on C-68. The others were so fatally flawed that they were withdrawn before they were even close to being implemented. Firearms owners and associations will carefully review these new regulations to determine their appropriateness; although I doubt that any regulations can correct the fatally flawed C-68 with its massive flaws, as I mentioned, and its losses of freedoms for the citizens of Canada.

In Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we must continue to fight the Liberal gun control Bill C-68. We must not allow people to forget just who did this to us — the federal Liberals. And all we hear from the third party on this issue, Mr. Speaker, is blah, blah, blah.

Mr. Speaker, costs are a very important issue when you're talking about C-68. It's going to cost approximately \$100 per firearm to register, which will total over \$2 billion — \$2 billion which can be spent much more appropriately dealing with crime and crime prevention, Mr. Speaker.

It's also important, Mr. Speaker, that all people be treated equally when it comes to firearm legislation, that no one be given exemptions. Mr. Speaker, you have to question . . . and I'm hoping that the minister will instruct his lawyers in Alberta that are taking this case before the courts to ask why is it that citizens are considered to be criminals if for any reason the justice system suspects they may be involved with a firearm or have knowledge of a firearm.

They are criminal when they start under this Liberal legislation, Mr. Speaker, and it's very important that we carry on with this court case. It's also very important, Mr. Speaker, that this House at some point in time during this session reiterate its opposition to Bill C-68. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1430)

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to hear the Justice minister's statement this afternoon in this House. I'm somewhat disappointed that there are colleagues in this Assembly who have already forgotten what the position has been of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party in opposition to registration of firearms.

The member who spoke about the all-party committee . . . and I happen to have accompanied the all-party committee to Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, in support of unregistering firearms in this province. I made also, personally, a presentation at Senate committee hearings opposing the registration of firearms in this

province, so I welcome it.

I am, Mr. Speaker, also disappointed that the federal government does not respect and does not wait for the Alberta Court of Appeal's decision on this entire issue. And I'm pleased that the provinces and territories continue, continue to oppose, and I'm pleased to see that the Justice minister has taken that. And we will continue to maintain our position on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

ROYAL ASSENT

At 2:32 p.m. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took his seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following Bill:

Bill No. 21 - The Appropriation Act, 1998 (No. 1)

His Honour: — In Her Majesty's name I thank the Legislative Assembly, accept their benevolence and assent to this Bill.

His Honour retired from the Chamber at 2:34 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — To a conversion to orders for return (debatable).

The Speaker: — Question no. 22 is converted to motions for return (debatable).

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Rail-line Abandonment

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the end of my opportunity to speak today, Mr. Speaker, I will be putting forward a motion seconded by the member from Carrot River, which will deal with the question of grain transportation and rail-line abandonment, particularly pertaining to the federal government.

I think that as I hear today from the members of the official opposition, that I think today this resolution that's being put forward — or motion — is one that all parties in this House will certainly accept and vote for because, Mr. Speaker, we are seeing some changes to the system in terms of grain handling in this part of the world that producers are unable to deal with in an adequate amount of time . . . to deal with the situation and the change of grain handling.

We are talking about the system, or a logistics system by which farmer-customers can move their grain to port in a very efficient and economical manner.

And, Mr. Speaker, this debate has been going on for years and years by which we deal with this in terms of the railways and the grain companies. And it's interesting when we talk about the issue, as I said, how things have not changed.

And I want to highlight how things have progressed, Mr. Speaker, related in terms of what's gone on in terms of the idea . . . as the words have changed, but the ideas have not.

I first, Mr. Speaker, wish to quote from the Hall Commission report on grain transportation, dated 1997. And this regarded the performance of the railways, Mr. Speaker. And under that in the area of a prairie rail authority, it was stated as a recommendation on page 521 of such report:

That a Prairie Rail Authority be established to provide the administration, operation, financial arrangements necessary to best meet the public interest, and to provide a continuing assessment of branch line needs and the rapidly changing industry, the commission recommends the establishment of a three-body force.

It also talks about the railways need to be compensated. But at the same time the railways must be responsible for adequate maintenance and any upgrading of lines within the basic network. Basically saying that as the railways are compensated for the movement of grain, Mr. Speaker, they are responsible to maintain those lines. And what was done in the Hall report was that these lines be secured to the year 2000, as the year 2000 approaches. As we all know, those guarantees and protections have been lifted, Mr. Speaker.

I want to refer to another report on grain transportation which talks about the questions of responsibilities to the railway system. And I refer to the Gilson report, Mr. Speaker, dated June 1982. Again a very comprehensive report dealing with grain transportation and the railways.

In this report, in the executive summary, page 9, section 8, and I would like to quote for the record too:

In return for being compensated, (the railways) it is recommended the railways' performance and service be assured in the following manner:

That Transport Canada administer the performance and service bonuses based on decisions and recommendations of the Central Co-ordinating Agency.

That the railways' investment plans and expenditures in western Canada be monitored by Transport Canada to ensure that fair and reasonable levels of investment are being made in the grain branch line network.

The Central Co-ordinating Agency be responsible for the promotion and encouragement of these efficiency . . . (of the) system.

And (that) any productivity gains in the system be shared in some manner between the railways and the producers . . .

This is 1982, Mr. Speaker. I now refer to the document that was put forward by the four western premiers, dated this year, Mr. Speaker, to deal with the question of the Estey report, which is reviewing the policy of rail-line abandonment in western Canada. And again I quote:

The four western premiers maintain that any solution that comes out of the review process must be consistent with the following principles: establishing appropriate and regulatory frameworks that promotes modern logistic practices; promoting a customer-orientated system that enhances international competition for the western grain industry to benefit producers; promoting a more effective logistics system through examination of grain handling and transportation supply; and promoting competition and producer choices in grain handling and transportation system, and establishing accountability.

Mr. Speaker, what I've read here, dated from 1997 . . . or 1977 to 1998, basically says there is a role and a responsibility for the railways in the movement of grain and there is a role and a responsibility of the federal government to maintain the railway system by which it is . . . will serve the farmer-customers that exist out there in the province of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, just to note: 1977, do you want to know who was in power as a federal government? — the federal Liberals under Pierre Elliott Trudeau; 1982, the report of Clay Gilson, at that time the government of the day was the Trudeau Liberals; 1998, the problems that we face in grain transportation in '97 and '98 in terms of lack of performance by the railways and the threat of grain-line abandonment to the railway system are the federal Liberals.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the question of rail-line abandonment it is not an argument of the red herrings that are put forth by other people about marketing. It is not about that. It's not about weather conditions. It's not about labour laws. It's not about these kind of things. It is a question of responsibility and who is responsible.

And the federal government has abdicated those responsibilities as all these groups have called for — from 1977 — a degree of protection for the farmer-customer who is the consumer of the goods. And this is some of the questions that we deal with in terms of commitment.

If the system is to serve the farmer-customers, therefore the railway system should serve the farmers. But what I see is a system that is serving the grain companies in terms of what their plans are out there, in terms of what's going on. In terms of the railways and the federal government and the federal government serving the farmer-customers, the federal government is serving the railways.

Where is the question of the farmer-customer in terms of dealing with a competitive nature out there in the industry? It's not a piece of the puzzle. Simply, what we are seeing in terms of rail-line abandonment is the transfer of cost to the producers and a transfer of cost to the taxpayers, be them municipal, be them provincial, in terms of the abdication of the cost in terms of the rail network to that of the costs of the deterioration of the road system, Mr. Speaker.

These are the reasons why we need a stop to the abandonment of rail lines at this present time as the Estey Commission reviews what is going on in grain transportation. And every person in Saskatchewan should be concerned in terms of what takes place within the industry. I have before me a map. It deals

with the question of the Saskatchewan rail network, and the three-year plans of CN and CP (Canadian National and Canadian Pacific).

And when we talk about the question of farmers taking hold of their future, as they have done historically in this province, Mr. Speaker, as we have seen them historically do this in terms of dealing with the cooperative movement, be it the UGG (United Grain Growers Limited), be it the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, be it the creation of political parties in terms of the Progressives, and the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) then NDP Party; as we've seen it in the creation of financial institutions, in terms of the credit union system; and as we've seen it in terms of the creation of economic entities in terms of retail marketing, the cooperative system, farmers are now seizing the opportunity themselves in terms of trying to take over some of the rail lines to provide the service themselves because the railway said they're not going to do it.

But when the farmers say they want to do this, what do the railways do? They go running off to Ottawa and say, well we want to take a chunk of a little piece of railway away and then the track is useless. I give an example of this. It's called the block 19. There's a great deal of experience, being involved in that area several years ago, understanding block 19, south of block 21, and that's the rail line that goes through Eston, Elrose, Wiseton, and areas like this, is that CN wants to take the track away from Eaton, from Mantario . . . (inaudible) . . . connects onto block 21.

(1445)

We're talking about a rail line that grows 22 million bushels of grain, cereal grain, high quality grain, where these producers are not getting the service they want, are willing to take the service that they want. And with taking away that portion of the track, these people cannot haul and make this an efficient way of moving their grain by moving grain into Alberta. They would be then forced to take the grain from Eston, backtrack it, take it to Saskatoon and across, which is being done now, as the railways say, in terms of the name of efficiency.

Where producers could take control of this, you could pass through it into Alberta. There's an opportunity there by which producers can do that, and that's being taken away.

Another example is the question of the branch line between Birch Hills and Prince Albert. The railways have gone running to the federal government saying, we're just going to give away a few kilometres of track. That few kilometres of track takes away a direct link for those people in that area, around Prince Albert and Birch Hills, to a direct link to Hudson Bay. And these are the kind of things that are going on out there.

And, Mr. Speaker, this is the three-year plan. I'd be afraid to see the 10-year plan.

I remember talking to a friend of mine one time from the area of Plato and he drew a map what he thought the railway system was going to look like in Saskatchewan. And he simply took that map of Saskatchewan, drew two lines through Saskatoon, two lines through Regina, and said that will be the rail system. That's a scary thought.

And when I talked about these reports and the question of regulatory in terms of competition, competition doesn't exist in the grain handling system. I know only of one place in Saskatchewan where both tracks run side by side, and that's the track that goes through Perdue-Biggar, where you have main line CP track and main line CN track that run side by side. That's the only place where the railways would be competitive in terms of offering service to farmers, and they don't do it. They don't do it.

And we're seeing a grain handling system change at such a rapid rate that producers are having a great deal of difficulty keeping up. And as agriculture has changed over time, Mr. Speaker, with those changes that are taking place as we've moved into speciality crops, we've also put great pressure also on the highway system. But we know, Mr. Speaker, that the efficient way to move cereal grains to port in this province and in western Canada is by rail and the federal government is abdicating the responsibility when they talk about the abandonment of rail lines in Saskatchewan.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move a motion. And I wish to move a motion, seconded by the member from Carrot River Valley, that says:

That this Assembly urge the federal Liberal government to immediately call a halt-order on all rail-line abandonment projects until the Estey grain review has completed its work, submitted its recommendations to the federal government, and those recommendations have been given due and thorough consideration with a view of providing maximum benefit to grain producers.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say, why do we need a motion in this Assembly in regards to such an important issue like rail-line abandonment, the question of a moratorium or the halting of rail-line abandonment until at least the Estey review is complete. And the reason why, Mr. Speaker, is that I'm reading here from the *Star-Phoenix* and it's dated March 19, '98 in which it leads off by saying:

Saskatchewan's federal cabinet minister, Ralph Goodale, all but ruled out legislated moratorium on rail line abandonment last week.

And another article here from the *Star-Phoenix*, March 14, which says:

But Ralph Goodale, minister of natural resources, stopped short of supporting legislation to halt rail line abandonment . . .

Then the next thing that we have to ask ourselves is why do we want to halt rail-line abandonment. Why do we want a moratorium on rail-line abandonment until Mr. Justice Estey reviews the grain handling system in a complete form.

Well, Mr. Speaker, prior to the elimination of the Western Grain Transportation Act — I believe that was just recently — the freight rates were set each year. The freight rates that were charged to the farmers were based on a cost that the railways

incurred on capital investment plus 20 per cent for profit.

Well today the rates are adjusted for inflation and the railways . . . based on the railways' input cost each year. But the railways' costs, we would suspect, are going down because of rail-line abandonment and lay-offs. The deregulation of railway transportation has led to the abandonment of approximately 3,400 kilometres of branch lines within the last 25 years, with another 1,400 kilometres identified that will be transferred or abandoned in the next little while.

CN and CP say that these branch lines are no longer viable. But if we ask the farmer out there whose grain is in the elevator, who can't move grain, he would say that if the train would come and pick our grain up, that maybe we would have a chance to make some money ourselves, plus the railway certainly might make a few more dollars.

In 1996, Mr. Speaker, according to *The Financial Post*, from the movement of grain, Canadian Pacific Railway had revenues of \$832 million in 1996. And the CN had revenues of \$570 million, Mr. Speaker, in 1996.

Railways are doing very well on grain movements, thank you very much. They want complete deregulations after 1999, and even before if they could get it, without any consideration of the service offered to our farmers. That would dramatically increase rates again.

I remember the farmers in my area saying that, you know, \$13 a tonne was what their cost to move a tonne of grain to port. Now that same cost is 35 to \$40 per tonne. And after deregulation in 1999, what will the cost be? I think only the sky is the limit.

Railways say, no, no, rates will not go up; they will actually in fact go down; we will compete with each other. That's not so, I would argue. Seventy-five to 80 kilometres apart — that's basically the average of distance between the CN and CP rail in most instances in the province of Saskatchewan. And besides, why would they beat each other up when they have the province divided in two already? — the CN in the North and the CP in the South. It wouldn't be very good business to compete.

Effects of deregulation without competition, I guess we can just look south of the border, Mr. Speaker. Burlington Northern in Montana have higher freight rates than even the rates in Saskatchewan. Why? Because there is no competition and because there is deregulation.

Where there is competition, like the barges on the Mississippi, railway rates are much lower in North Dakota. CN and CP would have us believe that they have become lean and efficient and export problems are never their fault. A new short-line railway, Carlton trail owned by Omni Trax in Prince Albert area, 35 employees rather than 70 employees, handling more traffic, union agreement is very similar and the employees seem very happy. And you know what the farmers say, Mr. Speaker? That it is in fact better service.

They have better service today from the short-line operation than the main line carrier. This short-line provides some lessons of how the transportation system might evolve. Short-lines should be given a fair chance to succeed before branch lines are

abandoned. If not, beware our road system. And everyone knows our road system in Saskatchewan. You've heard the lines: four and half times around the earth, the centre of the earth, the equator, that's how many roads we have in Saskatchewan.

And many of those roads were not built for the heavy, heavy traffic that we will see today and even more so with rail-line abandonment. Many of these roads are thin membrane surface pavements that will break up under the stress of those large loads.

And how about joint running rights, Mr. Speaker? They need to be examined more closely. Meaningful competition, a short-line moving grain to port on one of the lines or CN or CP running on the same lines, these are efficiencies that will happen in the form of true, true competition.

Competition is coming in telephones, competition is coming in the services of natural gas, competition is coming in electrical power — so why not competition on the rail line?

How about time lines that this wonderful legislation that the Liberal government gave us to decide whether we will buy or purchase a piece of abandoned rail. Well they give the public 60 days. Well that's a long time to arrange financing, I guess. I guess you need a good banker — and a very understanding banker — to be able to put together a business plan and get your financing in order in 60 days. But if the public doesn't want it or can't find a way to do it, then the province has 30 days and then the municipality 30 days. Well that just isn't enough. So we need to review that as well.

I want to congratulate the Department of Highways on the formation of the area transportation committees that will look at short-line railways and grain transportation. I also want to commend the Department of Highways for installing within the department a unit to help short-line rail develop.

If nothing is done, farmers are going to continue to take action on their own as they did in the Kindersley area. They're going to load their own cars and they're going to ship them to port, ship their products to port.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are some of the reasons why CN and CP should not be allowed to abandon railway track until Mr. Justice Estey . . . the review by Mr. Justice Estey is completed. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I second the motion from the member from Saskatoon Northwest.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter the debate and I'm a little bit disappointed that the member from Saskatoon Northwest didn't ask us to second the motion because we certainly would have.

We are supportive of the motion. We believe that it's imperative that we hear what Justice Estey has to say before any more of our infrastructure is ripped out of the ground. And I think there's real concerns about that. We've seen the rail companies make proposals and put forward their plan for rail-line abandonment, and it continues in spite of the fact that

there is a rail line transportation debate ensuing all across western Canada these days.

So we certainly believe that until those meetings and Mr. Estey has put forward his final report, that it would be at least an act of good faith if the rail companies would set aside their abandonment plans until the report from Mr. Estey is in. It may indicate all kinds of things that would be helpful in terms of the movement of grain products from western Canada.

However, it's a little bit ironic that the NDP cries crocodile tears regarding rail-line abandonment yet will do nothing to facilitate short rail line operations here in Saskatchewan. And one thing that they could do . . . or there's a couple of things that they could do to support rail-line abandonment here . . . or to support the call for short rail lines here in Saskatchewan. One of them of course, is the repealing of successor rights.

(1500)

Anyone that attended the short rail line conference here in Regina, and I did attend last year I believe it was, when we saw short rail companies, one after another, taking the platform and suggesting that they would be happy to come to Saskatchewan and start up short rail line opportunities here in this province, if indeed the short successor rights were dealt with here in the province.

So we believe that it's important that they do something of that nature as soon as possible. We've supported that right from the very outset. We can't help but wonder why this government wants to cling to this notion of successor rights, particularly for rail companies, when it's obvious that that is one of the major impairments for them starting up operations here in Saskatchewan.

The member from Saskatoon Northwest also says that it's about none of the other things, such as labour laws, marketing, or taking responsibility for their actions. Well I would say to the member from Saskatoon Northwest, it's about all of those things. Farmers just aren't concerned about, farmers just aren't concerned about their rail line closing down. They're also concerned about how they're going to market their product if that closes down. They also wonder whether or not labour laws are tied to this, and I think it's clear that they are. And they also want all players within the industry to take responsibility for their actions. And that includes this government taking responsibility for their actions in slowing down the progress for short rail line operations to start up.

Private business and farmers are willing to move in to take over these abandoned rail lines. All over Saskatchewan we are seeing that kind of opportunity come forward. Rail companies have not given them time to set their proposals, set up proposals, and the provincial government has to make these proposals feasible by dropping the successor rights. It's the only way it's going to happen here in Saskatchewan on a large-scale basis.

You may see from time to time operations starting up that don't think it's an impairment to them, but I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that if you look towards the American experience, the companies that have had any success in this maintain that successor rights are a problem for them.

The NDP should make the farmers of this province their top priority for a change, instead of unions. If you are truly interested in this subject to the point where you wanted to do something about it, you would be addressing the issue of successor rights and you would also not be siding with the unions whenever we see strikes in the grain transportation system, Mr. Speaker. That's a problem that we see constantly.

In the last, in the last several years, we have seen longshoremen going on strike, Mr. Speaker. We've seen other rail unions going on strike. And each and every time that it's happened, members of the NDP don't say a thing about it, don't say a thing about it. They may say something in private to their farmer friends, but they certainly don't speak in any public fashion in that regard. In private I suspect they tell the grain unions that they're supportive of what they're doing — grain handling unions.

Local governments, Mr. Speaker, stand to lose tax revenue if railways and elevators disappear from their communities. The federal government and Ralph Goodale seem clueless when it comes to the difficulties in the transportation and grain delivery system. We've been waiting for years and years and years for a review, Goodale's been promising it time and time and time again, and yet we see very little action on this.

Another area that if the NDP was truly interested in doing something to support the farmers in Saskatchewan and support the movement of grain here in Saskatchewan, they'd be addressing the question of fuel taxes. The fuel taxes for the, pardon me for the transportation companies here in Saskatchewan, the rail companies, are the highest in western Canada by far and yet they are unprepared to address that in any way.

The federal . . . nobody's talking about giving any more money to the railways. What we're talking about is, any time that the rail companies have a cost, and fuel taxes are a cost, what happens to that cost, Mr. Member?

What happens to it, Mr. Speaker, is it is directly transferred into the cost of delivering products for the farmers. Any time that there's a cost, it's directly transferred, and that member knows full well that high taxes in terms of fuel taxes directly go towards the farmers' cost at the end of the day. So any costs that you people impose, any cost you people impose, any cost this government proposes to raise is a direct impairment to the farmers of this province.

The federal Liberals' abandonment of the Crow benefit, coupled with the acceleration of rail-line abandonment, is putting even more stress on our road and railway infrastructure and the NDP is unwilling or unable, incapable of putting anything forward in terms of meaningful solutions to that problem as well. We see a government, Mr. Speaker, that on one hand talks about rail-line abandonment and on the other hand is putting less and less money rather than more and more money into a highway structure . . . infrastructure here in Saskatchewan.

They've made a grandiose promise of \$2.5 billion over 10 years, which comes down to \$250 million a year. And you've missed the mark on two of the last, on the last two budgets, the

first two years of that 10-year plan, Mr. Speaker. We see very little evidence that that is going to change in the future. And you're not helping with your taxation policies in Saskatchewan; it's only making it worse.

A study by the Organization for Western Canadian Co-operation shows that Saskatchewan levies the highest taxes on railways when land taxes, fuel taxes, and other charges are worked into the equation. All of those are directly transferable to the user — the farmer in this case.

A single grain train moving west would face the following government-imposed charges: in Manitoba it's about \$20,000; in Saskatchewan 22,500; Alberta \$9,000; British Columbia, 14,600.

So once again we see the policies of an NDP province here in Saskatchewan resulting in the highest costs to the rail companies, which is in turn turned over directly to the cost of grain and moving the product for the farmers. These costs apply to both existing lines as well as any short rail line opportunities here in this province. The NDP has given them a double whammy of high taxes and high labour rates.

The member from Northwest says that it's red herrings. Well all of these costs are directly transferable to the agriculture community here in Saskatchewan, and neither the federal Liberals nor the Saskatchewan NDP nor the provincial Liberals want to take any responsibility for this. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it's the farmer that's caught in between all of the time.

Between the failures of the Liberals and the NDP, farmers in rural communities have been poorly served by the governments of the day. In fact, Mr. Speaker, farmers in Saskatchewan believe that there's a rural revenge program going on and it's spearheaded by the provincial government here in Saskatchewan and Ralph Goodale on the federal scene.

So, Mr. Speaker, while we are supportive of this motion, we also believe that this government should be doing more than paying lip-service to the problem of rail-line abandonment here in Saskatchewan, and we believe that certainly the farmers of this province are supportive of our position.

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to enter into this debate, especially after the member from Kindersley has spoken. I've got a few things to talk to him about.

Let's look at the federal government framework, at the federal government frameworks . . . place decision-making authority for grain handling and shipping and grading with any grain companies, railways, ports, and federal authorities. Producers have been excluded from any decision making.

For example, producers and producer market organizations cannot choose their shipping route to export their grain or their preferred port to maximize their returns. Producers must pay for their grain cleaning and dockage even if their product meets export standards at the farm gate. Producers should have direct input into the key issues that affects them to ensure that they benefit from any changes in the grain handling and transportation system.

Mr. Speaker, on March 3 I attended a Hudson Bay Route Association convention in Prince Albert. At that convention, all speakers were encouraging producers to write letters to their federal minister and Liberal MPs (Member of Parliament) to stop CNCP from abandoning lines, at least till such time that the Estey report is done.

This is a situation that's facing . . . There is a situation that's facing north-east part of the province. One of the major challenges facing the Hudson Bay Route Association and Omni Trax, the new operators of the Hudson Bay railways, is expanding the size of the Churchill catchment area to increase grain volumes from the current level of about 400,000 tonnes per year.

A crucial factor in achieving this goal will be to maintain the rail link between Birch Hills and P.A. (Prince Albert) to move grain from the north-central area to Hudson Bay to the Churchill line. Not only the line from P.A. to Birch Hills could be dismantled but also between Prairie River and Hudson Bay. This will farther diminish the size of the Churchill catchment area.

Meath Park too has been in desperate situation; I guess they're looking at closing that line as well. The whole issue of rail-line abandonment has been brought to a head primarily as a result of action taken by the federal government. This elimination of the Crow benefit costing Saskatchewan farmers \$400 million annually in the last return . . . in lost returns.

In 1996, changes to the Canadian transportation Act essentially gave the railways a blank cheque to do whatever they want. The federal government, I guess thought it was time for them, for the railroad companies, to do it favours for them.

Last fall our Highways minister talked to the federal deputy minister of Transportation, what they intended to do about rail-line abandonment. You know what the answer was? I want to quote: "We thought we'd just leave it go for a few years and see what happens." That is irresponsible of the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at the other lines that were taken out. I want to talk about the one in between Paddockwood and Henribourg and now between Henribourg and White Star, and that has created a lot of problems to our roads in that area.

We had a highway that run from No. 2 over to Henribourg. Now they moved the elevator to White Star without any consultation with the RMs (rural municipality), with the provincial government, but still asking for the provincial government and the RMs to take responsibilities of building roads there. And we had a road in place to go to Henribourg already.

I just want to say, the member from Kindersley was talking about successor rights. I want to say, Omni Trax . . . we met with Omni Trax before they took the line over from P.A. to Warman, and that exact question was asked about successor rights, unions. I mean the union member was there. They asked him, are you worried about the unions? And I tell you he said no, that it's no problem.

So they purchased, Omni Trax purchased that line. And you know what? They hired just about every person that worked on that line for CN. They weren't scared. They think good workers, good Saskatchewan workers will be hired. Yes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1515)

Mr. Langford: — The member also talks about more money, that the Saskatchewan government is not putting enough money into highways. I'll tell you, when he's asking that, he's asking the farmers, he's asking the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, to put more money into roads. He hasn't even said that the federal government, it's their responsibility. I mean I would be ashamed to go to any of these little towns, to the farmers, and ask them for more money. And on the other hand he says we're taxed to death. Now he's asking for more money.

I want to talk about what are we doing. That's what he's going to be asking, is what are we doing? Well as you may be aware, the western premiers urged the federal government to establish a review of the grain handling and transportation system at a May 1997 conference to resolve grain transportation performance problems and develop a long-term, logical system improvement.

An Hon. Member: — That's important.

Mr. Langford: — You bet that's important.

All the western premiers from all the western provinces are united on the need of a provincial involvement in the review and on the importance of this issue to the western economy.

We have repeatedly called for action to improve the performance of the grain handling and transportation system to increase returns to producers and others while meeting customers' demands in a reliable, effective manner.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my seat now and let others continue on to the debate. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this motion because the fear of myself and of my colleagues is that the review being conducted by Mr. Justice Estey has little real meaning or purpose if while that review is proceeding, branch lines and the grain delivery points which are served by those branch lines are lost.

However, I do wish to say that I think some of the statements that have been made in the House this afternoon are perhaps a bit simplistic, which I found out in my term as being the MLA for North Battleford.

Of course North Battleford itself is secure in terms of rail-line abandonment, but we do have two lines out of our district, the Robin Hood and the Walburg lines, which indeed are in peril.

We in North Battleford have frankly been pleased to hear announcements by Saskatchewan Wheat Pool of an \$11 million

grain handling facility for North Battleford, with a similar announcement expected by Pioneer.

However, at a meeting over branch lines held in Meota, one of the communities on the Turtleford line, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool representatives made it abundantly clear that they would not be building an \$11 million facility for North Battleford with any intention of continuing to run a whole string of small elevators up and down the branch lines.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the member for Saskatoon Northwest has been too narrow on focusing in simply on the issue of the rail lines. Because the grain companies have also made it abundantly clear that by building the large new grain terminals, they are opting for centralized grain delivery points and they will not be operating those terminals in addition to the small delivery points. And they have said so very clearly and unequivocally.

If we are going to maintain, if we are going to maintain service on our branch lines it must somehow be in a way which is complementary to the new grain terminals, and we must find ways in which that can be facilitated.

Certainly all of us in Saskatchewan are concerned that the removal of the branch lines, the loss of the grain elevators, will first of all put enormous pressure on our secondary roads and highways. We know that that will create other enormous costs for the province and for our municipalities. We are also aware that the loss of the branch lines, the stations, the elevators, will make many of our villages non-viable. The tax base of many of those villages will be gone.

So we have great concern for what will be the long-term implications from the realignment of grain transportation. And I am told by many experts that it's anticipated that within a few years, most farmers will not be trucking their own grain. It will be trucked by companies, and of course we already see that becoming standard in many areas.

It is the hope of all of us that the review by Mr. Justice Estey will be able to find some workable and satisfactory compromise between the new integration and centralization represented by the grain terminals and the need to provide service to our smaller points, and also the desirability of keeping as much as possible of our grains on the rail bed and off the highways. But in order for that to happen, we have to give Mr. Justice Estey a chance to do his work and to come in with his report.

This is not simply a delaying mechanism in my view, Mr. Speaker. This is not an attempt to simply foist this matter off on a committee so we don't have to face the hard questions. Rather in my view, it is a question that we have appointed an eminent man to look into this problem, to make suggestions for us. And in that sense it would be a travesty not to give him an opportunity to report, and us to consider his recommendations, prior to taking action which cannot be reversed. Certainly we all know that once the branch lines are closed down, the track is removed, the elevator is torn down, then at that point, whatever Mr. Justice Estey may recommend becomes moot and has no meaning.

So I join in support, as do my colleagues, of this motion to say

that we want Mr. Justice Estey's report to come in. We are hopeful that it will provide helpful suggestions for us all.

However, I would encourage all members though to consider that this is not merely a rail line issue; indeed, it may not even be primarily a rail line issue. There are so many other factors.

The member for Kindersley mentioned successor rights. The member for Kindersley mentioned the lack of enthusiasm from the government side for the establishment of branch lines and independent railroads. There has been little discussion about the need in Alberta . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. Now I note with interest that it's two members who have already spoken on the record who are shouting across the floor at one another, and I'll ask the cooperation of the House to provide the hon. member for North Battleford to put his remarks on the record.

Mr. Hillson: — I didn't think it was that bad a speech myself.

Mr. Speaker, we know that in the province of Alberta, short-lines are popping up all over the province. We know that in the United States we have short-lines starting all throughout the Midwest of the United States. Can that not happen in Saskatchewan as well? I believe it can.

But it needs the cooperation of the grain companies. It needs the action of our farmers. And my fear is that when our farmers know for certain what the plans of the rail lines and the grain companies are, it will be too late for them to make alternate arrangements before they have lost service to their smaller communities.

So let us support the work of Mr. Justice Estey. Let us hope that his review and report will provide workable and valuable suggestions for us as we move our transportation system into the 21st century. Let us accept that the world will continue to turn and that to simply stake our ground on a grain transportation system that was founded in the days of 60-bushel wagons pulled by horse is not necessarily the best way to serve the population of this province today. But none the less, let us also say that we are committed to leaving as much as possible of our produce on the rail bed and not on the highway; we are committed to the viability of our small towns and communities; and we are committed to the process of the Estey report. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — Mr. Speaker, the motion moved by the hon. member from Saskatoon Northwest and seconded by the hon. member from Carrot River Valley reads:

That this Assembly urge the federal Liberal government to immediately call a halt-order on all rail-line abandonment projects until the Estey grain review has completed its work, submitted its recommendations to the federal government, and those recommendations have been given due and thorough consideration with a view to providing maximum benefit to grain producers.

Doesn't seem like too much to ask, to me. Or simply put, let's

not just tear up the tracks until such time as we know what the report says. However this kind of conduct from the railways, with the blessings of the Liberals, both here and in Ottawa, is not all that surprising. They have done it before.

You all remember the Hall Commission. Well the report from Mr. Justice Estey may not be any better received by Liberals than the Hall report was. Justice Hall really fell from favour when he told them the truth, as I expect Mr. Estey will.

Mr. Hall stated emphatically that if the Crow goes, buffalo will once again roam the Prairies. So guess what the Libs in Ottawa did with that report — they shelved it and hired an American to give them the answers that they wanted. So now they don't want anything to interfere with the railways as they redraw the map of Saskatchewan, and redraw it they will.

Don't kid yourself — the railways will not cooperate in any meaningful process with RMs, town councils, provincial highways, or short-line. They know the grain will wind up on the main line, one way or another. And we as farmers and rural taxpayers will pay the bill.

Far-away Liberals in Ottawa may have an excuse if they don't understand rural issues. But when a couple of Liberals from north-west Saskatchewan don't get the message, it is hard to understand.

For example, the member from North Battleford, working with other Liberals in the area, trying to cast blame for highway conditions on the provincial government when it is the federal policy, or lack thereof, that transfers goods from rail to road, thus destroying our highway system, then failing to fund a national highways program.

For example, I would just like to read a response I sent to the *News-Optimist* dealing with an unfair message delivered from the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from the Battlefords by a well-known Liberal who was, to their shame, trying to use his position in an important organization to shore up the failing Liberal fortunes in north-west Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission I will now, for the record, read my response to the ridiculous approach to a very serious matter. It stated:

I'm writing in response to an article by Owen Einsiedler in the March 25 edition of the *News-Optimist*. In the article, city councillor, Julian Sadlowski is quoted several times. From his comments, I am not certain that Mr. Sadlowski has a complete understanding of the situation regarding the twinning of the national highway system in this province.

All of the twinning done on these highways since 1991 was done in my constituency, starting at Borden in '93 in what was then Redberry constituency and concluding last fall at Langham in what is presently Redberry Lake constituency.

(1530)

Approximately 95 kilometres in all, and all in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Sadlowski, prior to becoming vice-president of the Yellowhead association, will remember attending a

meeting at my invitation in December in the town of Borden where we joined forces to kick-start this portion of the twinning.

I appreciated the support I received from Mr. Sadlowski at that time and also the support from the hon. member from Lloydminster, who has fought long and hard for the remainder of the Yellowhead Highway from Saskatoon to Lloydminster.

Since 1995 we've been joined in our efforts by Battleford-Cut Knife MLA, who also realizes the importance of this major artery in the north-west. What escapes me is Mr. Sadlowski's support of the Liberals in this matter. If the Liberal government down in Ottawa were continuing to pay the 50 per cent of the construction cost on the Yellowhead, I expect we would have seen the twinning from Lloydminster to Battleford completed by the turn of the century.

I would like to call on Mr. Sadlowski and the Liberal member from North Battleford to join with the NDP MLAs from north-west in demanding that Ottawa replace the 50 per cent funding for the Yellowhead. Our government is prepared to do its share as a province. Where is the Liberal commitment? Why should the people of Saskatchewan bear the whole cost while other provinces received federal money?

The Liberal Party is also responsible for the loss of the rail system that is costing us in so many ways. Mr. Sadlowski, as a representative of the Yellowhead Highway Association, has been quoted as making some very partisan remarks. I have traditionally counted on this group as allies in our endeavours to have Highway 16 twinned throughout north-west Saskatchewan. I hope that Mr. Sadlowski is not attempting to turn the Yellowhead Highway Association into a lobby group for the Liberal Party.

Perhaps the MLA from North Battleford should be supporting the proposed twinning of the Yellowhead, the remainder of the distance from my constituency to Lloydminster, instead of supporting his party's efforts to take advantage of a family tragedy by presenting petitions to twin not the Yellowhead, but the Trans-Canada.

I also want the good folks along the Yellowhead to know that the member from North Battleford is calling for the twinning of No. 1, not our Yellowhead. Why the Liberal member from the north-west would not join with us on our call to Ottawa I will never know. I also would like Mr. Sadlowski to admit he was supporting the Liberals friends and not representing the view of the Yellowhead association.

A year ago last August, I had the privilege of joining SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) representatives on a train trip to Churchill, including a tour of the port facilities. The conditions of the track was just another indication of how the federal government has fail . . . federal governments — because there was Tories involved from time to time — have failed to accept responsibility for a national transportation policy.

These are the same people that cut \$400 million annually out of the net of Saskatchewan farmers with the killing of the Crow, and through their neglect have virtually destroyed the potential

of the port of Churchill. Don't ever forget it was the Liberals that did that to us, and granted it was the federal Liberals, but Liberals just the same.

I guess it just goes to show you that my neighbour may well have been right after all when he claims that the Liberals in office were actually worse than the Tories in office. It was his idea that the Tories did less harm because they did nothing while they were in office, while the Liberals actually did something to you.

Well it was the past Liberal government that did the \$400 million job of killing the Crow, but it is the present Liberal member from the Battlefords who was letting Saskatchewan people down right now by not joining with us to demand a national transportation policy. In fact he could start by supporting the people of north-west Saskatchewan in asking for federal money for the Yellowhead so we could twin the rest of the highway from my constituency through The Battlefords to Lloydminster. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I agree with my counterparts in the legislature today and I also agree with the motion. I believe that farmers and small companies have to have time to set up short-line rails, and I believe the Estey report has to have time to work, but what my fear is that Ralph's rural revenge will once again take over. I believe in Saskatchewan we're going to be punished for only sending one federal Liberal back.

My second concern though is the Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture and Mr. Goodale seem to be just like a glove when it comes to things to do with Saskatchewan farmers and the things like the Wheat Board and other issues; they have the same stand exactly, so I have a hard time understanding the government's views today.

The member for Saskatoon Northwest said that competition is a problem and I agree — lack of competition that is. But he also said that labour laws are not part of the program here and not a problem.

Well every group that we have met with, one of the first things they have brought up is successor rights. They all say successor rights are one of the problems.

I also have a thing, a graph today, Mr. Speaker, and one of the other problems that they say is, is the fuel tax, and this is the railways talking. And if you look at the graph, Mr. Speaker, you look at how many cents per litre in each province are charged . . . I'd like to go by B.C. (British Columbia). I believe there's a 4 cent tax by the federal government. There's 3 cents by the province of B.C. There's about 7 by Alberta, 7 by Manitoba, and when we get to Saskatchewan it's 15 cents a litre. Well the railway is . . . the first thing they tell you is that they have nowhere to pass that on but to our farmers. So guess who picks up the tab?

Mr. Speaker, another problem we have is land tax where the rail lines sit. And with reassessment if anybody's been watching, the value of that land that the railroad is sitting on, the

reassessment has jacked that a way up. Once again the railways say they have nowhere to pass that on but to us the farmers. So once again we're picking it up.

If the provincial government was really serious about helping our Saskatchewan farmers, why don't we drop that 15 cent fuel tax down to 4, 3, 5 even, like the other provinces, and you would show me that you're really serious about helping our farmers.

Another problem I believe, Mr. Speaker, we have, is incentives by the railroads and grain companies to haul your grain to the larger centres. I'll give you an example. We have a small Pool elevator in the town of Saltcoats — a brand-new elevator in fact. But because it's a 24-car spot, the incentive in Langenburg is so great that they're trucking grain, after we haul it into the Saltcoats elevator, down the highway to Langenburg, and it's worth enough that they can make money doing that. We have a big problem, and that problem is with the railroads and the grain companies, Mr. Speaker.

These things have to be straightened out. This cannot carry on. The problem also is multiplied by the lack of funding for municipalities out there by this government, because when things like this happen, rural municipalities need more money to fund rural roads.

And in the last seven years they've been cutting and cutting rural funding. In fact municipalities, as the member from Regina Victoria says, you've cut back on rural funding, and he says we're asking for more money. No, Mr. Speaker. What we're asking for is return some of the money that we balanced the budget with. Not more money, some of the money you've cut from us in the last six or seven years.

Another area, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to address is not the east-west rail line to Thunder Bay and Vancouver, maybe we should be looking more seriously at the north-south one from Churchill right down . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Pursuant to rule 17(2) the time for the main debate on the motion has expired, and we'll now move to 10 minutes of questions and comments. Questions and comments are in order.

Mr. Johnson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to pose a question to the member for North Battleford. If he was prepared to agree with me in saying that the federal government is totally inept at their policies related to rail transportation, when they go to Japan and make an agreement to reduce the amount of carbon generated in Canada on one hand, and then come back to Canada and basically are going forward with a policy to reduce rail transportation and shift it over to the road at probably a four to six times the amount of carbon released as what was on the railway, that they are just simply not going through . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The member has been extremely long in his preamble. I want to ask him to put his question directly, immediately.

Mr. Johnson: — Does the member from North Battleford accept what I've said as accurate?

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I am aware that the hon. member is reflecting the views of his caucus that the international concern to reduce carbon emissions is crazy, bizarre, weird, and totally unjustified.

Unfortunately I would say to him that this is the way the world is headed. We are aware that greenhouse emissions are a serious problem. Global warming is a problem for our planet, and our federal government is joining with national governments around the world to try and address it.

How we can address it in a responsible manner that is economically feasible is indeed a serious issue. But he is right that we do not agree that it is crazy that the greenhouse gas emission and the value, quality of our environment have to be dealt with by our national governments. The Liberals stand by that. I realize you oppose that.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to direct a question to the member from Spiritwood. Mr. Member, you stated in your comments that . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. It is not in order to direct a question to the member from Spiritwood. The member from Spiritwood was not involved in the debate.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member from Shellbrook-Torch River. The member mentioned in his . . .

The Speaker: — The hon. member may want to direct it to the member for Saskatchewan Rivers. There is no member for Shellbrook-Torch River.

I'll recognize the hon. member from Cannington and I'll ask him to be fairly brief in his question.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We hear from him so seldom.

Mr. the member from Spirit . . . Sask Rivers, you mentioned in your comments that successor rights were not a problem. Yet at the short rail conference last year, every representative from a short rail line said it was indeed a very big problem. In fact as even your minister at the time indicated, that they were prepared to look at each individual case on a case-by-case basis to eliminate successor rights.

If that is the case, why not simply eliminate them totally, instead of waiting, until after somebody comes in here and spends all their money, to give them the indication whether successor rights are going to be in place. They're not going to spend the money unless it's there.

Mr. Langford: — I'm glad, Mr. Speaker, somebody knows that I'm from Saskatchewan Rivers. This guy . . .

Anyways, he's talking about successor rights and that nobody will invest in . . . companies won't invest into our railroad system. I've pointed out Omni Trax. They invested; they've got no problems and they hired, they also hired our employees from CN. I mean that is not a problem.

I just want to ask the member, maybe you should go and talk to the Omni Trax and ask them if they do have problems.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to direct my question to the member from Saltcoats. And I know that the Saskatchewan Party would take all the taxes away from the railways and give them a free ride and that they would give more to municipalities on the other hand. And in fact if balancing the budget is not important to them, I'm wondering if the member would table the Saskatchewan Party's policy on railway taxation for the benefit of the members of the house.

(1545)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to get the opportunity to answer questions because we definitely need the practice. We'll be on that side within a year, acting as ministers and we will be answering you people every day. So I'd like to thank the member.

Actually as we have said, we agreed with the motion put forth by the members and seconded by that member. But I think if that government was really serious about what they're bringing forward today and you look at this chart that I have here, all you'd have to do is drop the gas about 10 cents a litre and every farmer in this province could make a few more dollars. So until you do that I don't really believe for one minute that you're serious about the motion you presented today.

The Speaker: — The 75-minute debate has expired. No, the 75-minute debate has expired. I advise all hon. members that if you wished to put the question then the debate had to conclude prior to the expiration of the 65 minutes. It was at that point that it was in order to have the question put, unless of course the House would determine otherwise.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I would request leave of the House to put the question now. I think the members were under the impression that they were going to provide for the time to have the question put during the question period.

The Speaker: — The hon. member from Prince Albert Carlton requests leave of the House to put the question on the motion. Leave is required in order to put the question. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

The division bells rang from 3:47 p.m. until 3:52 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 31

Flavel	Van Mulligen	Wiens
MacKinnon	Tchorzewski	Johnson
Whitmore	Upshall	Kowalsky
Calvert	Bradley	Koenker
Trew	Renaud	Hamilton
Stanger	Jess	Wall
Kasperski	Ward	Murray
Langford	Murrell	Bjornerud

Toth
Heppner
Goohsen

D'Autremont
Osika

Boyd
Hillson

Nays — nil

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to present a motion to the House regarding the transcripts of the following debate.

Leave granted.

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a motion, moved by myself and seconded by the member from Kindersley:

That the Legislative Assembly requests the Speaker to send copies and transcripts of the 75-minute debate motion regarding railway abandonment to the Prime Minister of Canada, the federal Minister of Transportation, the federal Minister of Agriculture, and the federal Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 — Health Care System Review

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's certainly a privilege to stand in this Assembly today and to speak to a very important issue that's reflected in the province of Saskatchewan by many people across this province, and that's in regards to health care. And at the end of my remarks I'm going to be moving a motion, seconded by the member from Saltcoats:

That this Assembly urges the NDP government to recognize that a full-scale review of the current health care system is warranted given that five years have passed since it introduced its major health reform initiatives, in order that the government and all Saskatchewan residents can see why the current system is failing so many more residents in Saskatchewan than it did in 1993, yet costs more than it ever did; and that this Assembly further urges that the closure of the Plains Health Centre in Regina is put on hold until such a review is completed given the questions surrounding the number of Regina hospital beds that are adequate to care for the population of southern Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope and I trust that we will see the . . . that when a vote comes on this particular motion that indeed the members of this Assembly will indeed unite as well, and certainly reflect the views of the many residents across this province — certainly the southern part and the eastern part of this province — in regards to the Plains health care centre, but most importantly to all residents of the province of Saskatchewan in regards to health care and how it affects each and every one of us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reason we brought forward this motion is because of the many number of letters. And I just received, in fact, just before I walked into the Assembly for question period this afternoon, received a note in from my secretary of my office, or office assistant, with two more phone calls that had arrived at the office from individuals who had called and basically said, please work to keep the Plains Health Centre open.

Mr. Speaker, those were two phone calls. I also received three letters just when I entered the Assembly this morning, entered my office, got to my office, from individuals with the same message, saying please work to retain the Plains health care centre.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the letters they're writing, they're not just writing the letters because somebody else is saying keep the Plains health care centre open. What I've found, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people that have come to me have contacted me, have contacted me for many different reasons.

(1600)

In some cases employees working in the current Regina Health District have called. Of course their jobs are on the line; they have a reason to call. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and other people have reasons as well. And while I suggest that if we're just looking at saving jobs and that's the only reason, I think we've got to look beyond that. I think we need to find some real reasons as to why you would look at keeping the Plains health care centre open.

And when I look at what different ones have written, some of the reasons, the one letter I have in my hand here right now just talks about an individual . . . a couple writing in, and the person writing this letter says, I would like to see you and your fellow MLAs vote down the closing of the Plains hospital. He says:

I waited six months for open-heart surgery and (he says) I would have waited longer except for the fact that I ended up in the emergency room.

There was no more wait; he had to receive this care. And his wife goes on to explain as well how much they appreciated the staff and the care that was given to them through the Plains health care centre.

And I can suggest to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, having visited that facility on numerous occasions over the number of years that I have been an MLA in the province of Saskatchewan, I visited all kinds of patients in the major hospitals, certainly here in Regina and outside of Regina, but the Plains health care centre, many of the patients I've visited have been there as a result of respiratory or, in most cases, heart patients, individuals who are needing special care and needing heart surgery.

What I've found, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that every one of the patients that I talked to had just high accolades for the service that they had received, for the service that had been provided and for the care that they had received not only from the medical professionals, the doctors, but certainly the staff on the floors as they had prior to and post-operative care.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about the Plains health care centre and we see the number of letters that keep coming in, where people are coming up to us and keep asking us to raise the concern about what's going to happen when this hospital closes and the Minister of Health just indicating the other day that there will be no loss of beds in the city of Regina. That may be true, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the district and the government have already eliminated a number of beds to the point where we're finding that there are shortages that we're facing on a constant basis.

And we saw this just the other day. A call into our office from a very concerned professional who had indicated that they had been informed that the General and the Pasqua were going to have to close the doors on their emergency services because they did not have beds available, and thus they will all fall on the Plains health care centre.

And as we were chatting with a couple of the care-givers at the Plains health care centre the next morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was interesting to note how they mentioned the workload that they had that evening and the fact that they actually had to call more people in — in fact ask people to stay on, rather than when they had completed their time of work, they were asked to stay on because there was such a demand and workload placed on the emergency services at the Plains health care centre.

Mr. Speaker, or Deputy Speaker, when we look at and when we discuss this issue of health care in the province of Saskatchewan, it's not just about bricks and mortar and beds, more beds, lack of beds, or even more money, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's the livelihood of individuals. It's the desire of people to receive adequate and prompt health care.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe people in this province feel very strongly. They feel that they are already paying high enough in their taxes to justify and suggest that they need and they feel that they should have adequate health services. Whether it's in here in Regina, whether it's at the General, whether it's at the Pasqua or the Plains Health Centre, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at health care in the province of Saskatchewan, people feel very strongly about it.

In fact just over the weekend, I don't know exactly how many people I chatted with or people who came up to me at functions I was at, and the very first question that I was asked about is, are you standing up for us? Are you speaking out about our concerns regarding the closure of the Plains health care centre? So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about health care, it goes far beyond the closure of the Plains health care centre.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a motion or a Bill before this Assembly that suggests the government take a long, careful look at health care expenditures in the province of Saskatchewan and how it's delivering health care.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, even the Conference Board of Canada is suggesting it's time to review health care delivery, not only across Canada but in each province; in Saskatchewan in particular. It's time to review how we are delivering the services and whether or not the current delivery of care is meeting the need that we are facing on a daily basis.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at . . . we just debated a motion in this Assembly where the government members brought forward a motion suggesting that we urge the federal government to put a moratorium or put a hold on any further branch line abandonment until the Estey report is delivered and presented to the federal minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, or the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would seem to me that if it's appropriate for the government to put a hold or ask for the federal government to put a hold on any further closure of branch lines in the province of Saskatchewan, I think it would be appropriate as well for this government to look very carefully at their plans to close the current Plains health care centre and put a hold as well on the closure of the Plains health care centre until they have taken the time to review how they have spent their money and whether or not we are receiving value for the dollar we are putting into health care expenditure in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, or Mr. Deputy Deputy Speaker, when you look at health care spending, and the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health and the Premier will argue that the health expenditures and budget in the province of Saskatchewan eat up one-third of the expenditures out of the General Revenue Fund. And no one is arguing that. One-third — \$1.72 billion I believe this year is going into health care expenses in the province of Saskatchewan.

However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at . . . when you talk to the public, you talk to individuals on the street, you talk to individuals who call my office because they've been put on a waiting-list for a specific operation, regardless of what it is, or they're laying in a bed in one of our local hospitals, waiting for a bed for a specific procedure, to tell them that we have \$1.72 billion being expended in health care — they just don't understand it. They just don't . . . that doesn't raise anything with them.

They say, well if we're spending \$1.72 billion, how come I'm on a waiting-list such as six months from now I may get that MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan that I've been scheduled for — six months from now, not a month from today. Or why am I on a waiting-list for six or eight months for knee surgery or hip surgery. Or even as the letter that I brought forward earlier, waiting for six months for a heart operation and the fact that it was scheduled earlier was only scheduled . . . the fact that it was bumped up was because of the fact that this gentleman ended up in the emergency room. He ended up in an emergency situation, and therefore his need was dealt with.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not acceptable. Most people feel that if you are in a situation where you are facing a crisis situation, our health care system should be meeting that need. If indeed we're spending \$1.7 billion in health care expenditures in the province of Saskatchewan, if indeed it's one-third of the provincial budget, then why do we have waiting-lists? Why do we have fewer beds? Why do we have fewer people delivering the services?

Those are some of the questions, Mr. Deputy Deputy Speaker, that people are asking. In fact we've got to the point where

many people come up to me and they basically say if it's a lack of money, they're saying, why don't we go back to the old premium we used to have, back in the Blakeney days and a time when I believe it was in fact the premier . . . Mr. Blakeney was the premier of the day when they removed the annual health premium. Why don't we go back to a premium?

I'd be more than willing to pay a premium if I knew it guaranteed me access to a service. That's what people are saying because they feel that if it's the funding that's the problem, then maybe it's . . . then they would be willing to participate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's more than just funding. I believe we need to take a careful look at how health care services are delivered in the province of Saskatchewan.

We heard this earlier this year in the Minister of Finance as a report to this Assembly and as he presented his budget to the Assembly. The government spoke of putting \$88.8 million more into health care expenditures in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now to the person outside of this Legislative Building, they would say, \$88 million more? Boy, that's great. Maybe that will speed up the access to this certain operation I'm waiting for.

But lo and behold, when we look at the numbers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the \$88.8 million, very little, if any, will see . . . will be put into avenues whereby the services that people are looking for really address, \$88.8 million is not going to add one more bed to the current system to address the shortfalls that we've seen even last week in regards to the lack of beds really put pressure on the emergency services. This \$88.8 million is not going to address the need of the access to CAT (computerized axial tomography) scan services or MRI services, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the \$88 million and you find that most of it's wrapped up in bricks and mortar and meeting the needs of health districts that are running deficits, very quickly you realize that throwing more money into the health care system, as we have been doing in the past, doesn't necessarily translate into more money for actual services such as acute care or such as doctor services or nursing services, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we have the member from Regina crying from his seat again, crying wolf, the same member who used to stand on this side and cry the blues about even when the former government used to put a few dollars more in and say, it's not enough, it's not enough. That's what the member is saying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm not talking of more dollars. I'm talking of the fact . . . Let's take a look at where we're spending the dollars today. I'd like the member from Regina — I don't know if it's Regina Centre — to take the — or Regina Victoria — to take the time, maybe he can tell me whether or not the \$1.72 billion is being spent appropriately.

Are we putting the dollars into the right areas? Are we putting them into the areas where we really meet the fundamental health needs of the residents of this province, Mr. Deputy

Speaker? I think and I firmly believe that is the area that needs to be delved into and looked at very carefully. And the unfortunate part, Mr. Deputy Deputy Speaker, is the fact we've been trying to determine that. We've been trying to get some information that would help us to get a better idea of how our health dollars are being expended.

And I can say as of today we're at least starting to get some of the information we're looking for. We're looking for that line by line expenditures from the boards, from the district boards, such as we have the departments laid out before us in the General Revenue Fund and in the accounts of the Minister of Finance.

We need that information, Mr. Deputy Deputy Speaker, so that we can indeed look very carefully and determine whether or not more money needs to be put . . . earmarked towards health care, or whether we start looking at the fact of addressing the current funding that is there and determining whether it is meeting the need, or some of that money could be used better in one area versus the other.

And when I talk about how money is being used, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the concerns that district boards have raised in the past is the fact the money that is earmarked and that is sent to them has . . . basically it's earmarked for certain services. And the district boards are limited in how they can utilize those funds within their own district.

One of the big concerns, Mr. Deputy Deputy Speaker, is the fact that boards do not have the ability if they see a need for acute care funding to transfer; if there's an over abundance in the home care area, put some of that into your acute care fund. They can move from acute care into heavy care or into home care, but not into acute care funding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . Deputy Deputy Speaker, when we look at the Plains health care centre or when you look at the needs of health care beds and acute care beds throughout the province, as individuals at the Lanigan meeting that I attended most recently indicated, and as they're looking at cutting the number of acute care beds in their little hospital — which is not that far, about an hour or less from the city of Saskatoon — when you find out that people are on waiting-lists because of the lack of bed space to meet the needs of post-operative care, some of the suggestions that came out of the meeting — and I've heard them not only at Lanigan; I've heard them at other communities where — well why don't we utilize the beds that we have here right now rather than shutting them down. We're obviously short some beds. Why don't we have maybe the Saskatoon Health District transfer some light care or that post-operative . . . transfer people for post-operative care out to the local hospitals and free up some of those beds for the major surgeries that people are waiting for.

(1615)

Mr. Deputy Deputy Speaker, I believe when you look at . . . and when we talk to people, people across this province do have good and sound ideas. And people across this province aren't interested in just spending more money for the sake of spending money. People have learnt in the past how to adapt, how to work with what is available, how to make it last, or stretch that

dollar out, whether it's in providing for the home and whether it's in providing for their children or providing for services in the local community.

And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can also tell you that people across this province are more than willing to reach out to meet the needs of others — and I believe in health care — they would love to do that.

And just for an example, the Lions Club recently held a breakfast to raise some funds to help a young individual who was born with I believe it's muscular dystrophy to go to camp. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was chatting with the family they were just shocked as to how the people poured out and met that need — almost \$5,000 was raised and I believe the camp costs a little over \$4,000.

But to realize that the individuals in the community were willing to give of themselves to meet the needs of a little boy in the community, what does that say to you and I, Mr. Deputy Speaker? That says that people in Saskatchewan are giving people. People in Saskatchewan are ready and willing to reach out and meet the needs of those less fortunate and those around them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that's what the people of Saskatchewan are asking this government today. They're asking this government to step back, to take a broader look, and determine whether or not, number one, the current wellness model is working and is working appropriately and is really meeting the needs of the patients or the taxpayers of this province; and number two, more specifically in regards to the Plains health care centre, they would love, and they are asking the government, sit back, take a look, and review where we're at and whether or not the Plains health care centre and its closure, its imminent closure, are necessary or whether or not we're jumping the gun on this one.

I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the decision to close the Plains health care centre, and we've heard it time and time again, was we don't need more than so many beds in the city of Regina. And that may be fine. I don't think anyone will disagree with that. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Plains health care centre was built in the mid-'60s, the Plains health care centre was built keeping in mind the needs of all of southern and the eastern part of the province of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the number of hospitals or facilities that have been closed across this province, certainly in southern Saskatchewan, the number of beds that have been closed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe it's time to take a moment to sit back and take a look and determine, okay, maybe we need to take another look. Maybe we need to reassess. Maybe it's time we sat back and determined, well that Plains health care centre, we're not just talking Regina any more, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're not just talking the area surrounding Regina — we're talking a very broad section of southern Saskatchewan.

And in that regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people across the southern part and certainly the east part of this province really feel that the Plains health care centre provides a service that they feel is important to them. Whether it's the people in

Assiniboia, whether it's the people even in the Weyburns or the Estevans of this world or Moosomin or Kipling or Saltcoats, the Saltcoats area, Yorkton area, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people are concerned. We're seeing that.

I'm sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that even members of the current government, members of the NDP caucus are receiving numerous letters and phone calls raising the same concerns and the same issues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would seem to me that it would be appropriate and it would show a commitment by this government to the people of Saskatchewan. It would also say to the people of Saskatchewan . . . this government could say to the people of Saskatchewan: yes, we're listening; yes, we hear you; yes, we understand your concerns.

And by even just suggesting that yes, we're going to sit back for a minute and we're going to follow the advice of the Conference Board of Canada and review our current wellness model to see whether it's working, to see whether or not our health dollars are being spent wisely, and whether or not it would be appropriate to close the Plains health care centre as we've already decided.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe last week I mentioned about an article in *MacLean's* magazine where it pointed out the fact that one of the Grey Nun's hospitals in Edmonton that was shut down I believe about three or four years ago, they are now resurrecting that hospital because they've all of a sudden found out that while they were closing hospital beds a number of years ago, they may have closed too many. In fact not just "may have," they're bringing more hospital beds on because of the need that is available there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the same thing is going to apply here. Why wait and find out after the fact? Then you have to pour more money in to the two facilities if the Plains centre is totally closed down and turned into another use. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would be appropriate to take that look now before we rush headlong into the full closure and then we can't turn the clock back, then we've got to look at another means of reaching out to meet the needs of health care in the province of Saskatchewan.

So therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's important for us to take a careful look. It's important for this motion to come forward. And so I therefore move, seconded by the member from Saltcoats:

That this Assembly urges the NDP government to recognize that a full-scale review of the current health care system is warranted given that five years have passed since it introduced its major health reform initiatives in order that the government and all Saskatchewan residents can see why the current system is failing so many more residents in Saskatchewan than it did in 1993 yet costs more than it ever did; and this Assembly further urges that the closure of the Plains Health Centre in Regina is put on hold until such a review is completed given the questions surrounding the number of Regina hospital beds that are adequate to care for the population of southern Saskatchewan.

I so move.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also have a few comments I'd like to add to the member from Moosomin today, to his comments, and I agree very much with what we've put forward here today — that reform has really been a failure to say the least. We've closed — what? — 52, 53, now 54 hospitals. The Plains hospital is closing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe, if we go to the Plains for just a minute, that a lot of the dollars that came to build the Plains to serve the south side of the province and the eastern side of the province was donated money. And I'm sure those people when they donated that money felt that that hospital would be there for a long time.

What has happened now in the 20 years that it's been there, and all of a sudden it's an . . . And by the way, it's been a very, very good hospital. Anybody that's had anything to do with it, had anybody in there, has nothing but good things to say about it.

I'm not sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and as the government has done this year, they've put more money into health and I guess we should be thankful for that — but I'm not just sure that money is the answer to all the problems in the case of health care.

We've closed all these hospitals; we've closed many beds; we've cut many nurses' jobs or LPNs (licensed practical nurses), orderlies; we have a doctor shortage in many areas of the province. And I'm not just sure money is going to help.

We seem to have loaded the bureaucracy and the administrative part of health care so heavy that it's eating up any additional funds that we have and we have none left over to hire extra nurses or to re-open some of the beds that have been closed in the last five or six years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I feel, too, that when we come to regional hospitals such as Estevan or Yorkton or Moose Jaw, Swift Current, these are the places that we really have to start to look at to take the load off the Regina hospitals, seeing that we're only going to have two when the Plains is finally gone.

These places, with the way we're heading now, are actually turning into nothing more than band-aid stations. And I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that unless we do something quick to make these hospitals viable, the problem is only going to get worse.

I take for an example the hospital in Yorkton. It covers an area from Kamsack, Canora, Preeceville, Esterhazy, Langenburg and all the smaller centres in between and should be servicing the need we have there. Instead of that, people are going to the Yorkton hospital, stitched up, put bandages on, whatever the case may be, and forwarded into the Plains Health Centre . . .

An Hon. Member: — If there's a bed.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Yes. If there's a bed. That's the other problem. When you get here, most of the time there isn't even a bed and they have to turn these people away or send you down

to the Howard Johnson, as happened in the last week. And that's the overflow for our health care system in Regina — the Howard Johnson Hotel.

And once again we have to compliment those people for the fine facility they have in that hotel, but it's not really . . . it wasn't designed to be part of the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, Deputy Speaker, I'd like to touch on a number of the things that I feel that were really . . . there's a shortfall in our health care system, and kidney transplants are one of them. And I believe we have one case in Regina and another one in Saskatoon where a donor is available but there's no bed to do the operation.

And the information we receive, that kidney dialysis costs about 30,000 a year to give dialysis, renal dialysis, to the patient and only \$15,000 for the transplant. So common sense would tell you that the quicker we can perform this surgery and help this person through to have less pain and suffering and get the problem over with and get them back to a normal life, would save us all money and save these people a lot of discomfort. But now with the state of our health care, we can't even perform these surgeries; we have a big, long waiting-list.

Another subject that I talked about earlier today in question period was the cost of ambulance service to people in rural Saskatchewan. And the person that I was talking about today had shown me bills: one for 1,100-and-some dollars; one for 700-and-some dollars; another one for 500-plus that he shared with a person from Yorkton to come into Regina — so the total bill was over, was over a thousand dollars once again. And this goes on and on in rural Saskatchewan because hospitals such as Yorkton and the ones I've mentioned, like Estevan, Swift Current, Moose Jaw, Melville, cannot handle the problems that's going on out there.

So I guess what we're really seeing out there is not just a one-tiered health system or a two-tiered health system, it's actually a multi-tiered health system. Because when people have to start spending their own money to receive health benefits in this province, we're not all being treated on an equal field. So once again, it's a multi-tiered system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd also like to just touch on for a minute the hepatitis C, which is part of our health care in this province and on all over the country, and the compensation that they're being . . . received for something that was no fault of their own. And I go back to my constituent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who acquired, contracted the disease in 1982 and is going to fall through the cracks because the Health ministers of the provinces and the federal government have saw fit to only cover from 1986 to 1990. And I have no understanding how they could justify such a thing. I feel that they're showing absolutely no compassion and have no feelings for the people of this province.

Dialysis, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to touch on a minute because this is something I've lobbied for for a long time for the Yorkton area, and finally the Minister of Health has agreed. But in doing so, we won't receive any dialysis machine up and running there until the fall, and I wish that could be speeded up a little bit, but I'm thankful it's finally going to happen.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I give you some of my thoughts on this motion and I would hope the government members opposite would also find it in their hearts to support this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and to speak about our health system. Of course I will not be supporting the motion put by the members opposite because I'm proud of our health system, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of its evolution and I'm here to build the health system, not to criticize it and knock it down and to lay out false premisses about the health system.

Mr. Speaker, we have, since we've gone into the health renewal system, the health renewal process in Saskatchewan, the most modern and up-to-date hospitals anywhere in Canada, perhaps in the world. We have an ambulance system and home care system and a system that provides preventative measures second to none in the country, and we've got to keep it that way, Mr. Speaker.

And we're doing that, Mr. Speaker, not because the federal government is helping us, not in the least. The federal government used to support the health system with 50 cents on every dollar and they have now reduced it to 13 cents on every dollar, and it's the Saskatchewan taxpayer that's picking that up.

And we're not doing it because of any help that we're receiving from the Liberals sitting across from us, led by the good doctor who is saying that he would repeal the districts and replace them by appointment — not by election — but replace them by appointment. And he says that he'll go back to the old system where this is going to be done on a local basis, back to the idea of 400 health boards, and back to the idea of no rationalized health system eating up the valuable dollars that are needed for the new services that are being put into the places like the Pasqua, and the Plains . . . the General Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge though, in this argument, that the politics of talking about the Plains hospital at this time is very much an emotional issue, and I acknowledge that because I've experienced it in my own home town in Prince Albert when we went through the process of rationalizing our system and deciding what is the best for the residents that are going to use the system.

(1630)

Now in both cases there were very strong emotional ties to a certain hospital. In our case in Prince Albert, we had the Holy Family Hospital, which was supported very strongly over the years by all the people that went there. My two daughters were born in that hospital and it was an emotional tie to me, Mr. Speaker. There are many people who served in that hospital as employees; people that went there and received excellent care in that hospital and they had an emotional tie to it. On top of that was the factor that the hospital was run by the Sisters of Charity, I believe it was, Mr. Speaker, and they had a tremendous support in the community for their dedication to the community.

So we . . . When the health boards, starting way back in the '80s, looked at how to provide the best system for people in that area, they looked at it and they said we have to combine it. We have to combine it. They put together two studies prior to 1991 and they said, we have to combine it. Why? Because we need to have that critical mass of specialists in one place. We need equipment; we cannot afford equipment in two places. We need to consolidate the equipment in one spot. Those are the two main issues and those were health related. And those issues had to be . . . had to override the emotion of keeping the two hospitals going.

Mr. Speaker, I submit, when I hear the arguments about the Plains, that there is a very similar ring. People say, particularly in rural Saskatchewan, in southern Saskatchewan, they say that this is our hospital. It was the Plains hospital which is touted to be as the rural hospital. And they say we have adequate parking there and we know how to get there. And they have ownership of that hospital.

So therefore, Mr. Speaker, using those arguments alone would make great sense just to keep the Plains hospital going. But when you put the health arguments forward, which the health board had to do — the local health board had to do — then all of a sudden the picture changes, because their job is to provide the best health care they can for the dollars they have available. And what they saw was the need, for example, of a new MRI here, right here in Regina.

What they saw was a need to be able to attract specialists so that all of the procedures, the technical and very sophisticated procedures, even the one like was mentioned by the member across the way of the need for kidney transplants, you can only do that if you are able to attract specialists and keep your specialists.

And specialists these days will not come and stay unless you have a system that's got colleagues for him to consult with and has got all of the equipment. So you put that idea together and that's really where the consolidation of hospital care comes from, the need to be able to put our doctors into a situation where they can best serve, to the best of their capabilities.

Mr. Speaker, taken on top of that, then there was the decision, okay if you're going to go to two hospitals instead of three, which one do you choose — which one do you choose? That's a very difficult decision. When I consulted with people who were knowledgeable about why the board made the decision on using the Pasqua and using the Plains hospital, here are the arguments that came forward.

First of all, access. The Pasqua is a good hospital for access. Everybody knows the Lewvan Drive, where it is. Everybody in this area who has ever come to Regina knows where the Lewvan is and everybody knows that the Lewvan carries a lot of traffic but it carries it quickly and efficiently. And particularly if you're coming from out of town, from the North, from the West, or from the South you can access the Lewvan very easily and the Pasqua is within a stone's throw of the Lewvan — accessibility, right there.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes down to the General Hospital, that was already the main hospital. The General Hospital serves

more people than all of the other hospitals put together in this area practically. The General is where the babies are born, my fellow members tell me.

So, Mr. Speaker, you have to keep those two things in mind. The General was getting older so it did need renovation.

Now when you consider the Plains hospital, we know what it had going for it because I already mentioned that. What has it got going against it? The fact that it needs a new sprinkler system, Mr. Speaker. The fact that it did not have wheelchair accessibility for all the rooms, and the fact that it had asbestos which needs to be removed.

So, Mr. Speaker, in order to upgrade the Plains and make that choice as one of the hospitals, you would have to put in new sprinklers, wheelchair accessibility, and asbestos replacement. It's possible that that could be done at the expense of one of the other hospitals. At the same time, while you're doing that, you have 160 patients that have to go somewhere. You have to have somewhere for them to go.

The decision then was made, and rightly so I believe, by the health board in Regina and district that what they should do is build additional beds and put them in the Pasqua and put them in the General Hospital, an equivalent number of beds to make up for the beds that would be lost when the Plains was decommissioned and used for other purposes.

So what they are doing is, they are moving all of the beds from there, adding services, not one bed to be lost to this area. So people should not be scared off by somebody who may be doing some scaremongering and saying, where are we going to be?

That is something, Mr. Speaker, that has been going around. People have been asking the question: well where are these people going to go? Without waiting for the answer, members of the opposition have been using the emotional argument and forgetting that there is a health reason for all of this.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the emotional argument will win in the short run, but only in the short run, Mr. Speaker. Over the long haul, I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the members on this side in this government will be supportive, will be very supportive of the health board in the process that they're going through. It's important to, it's important, Mr. Speaker, for the process to continue. It's important for the health and well-being of all of the citizens in this area for this to happen.

I sometimes ask myself the question: well why is it that the Tories would be using this as an issue? And I guess it doesn't take too long to get an answer to that question because, Mr. Speaker, the Tories in this province at this time unfortunately lack credibility. And they are searching desperately, and have been, for an issue. They lost their credibility because of the mess and the legacy that the Devine government left them with.

So what did they do? They're trying several things. They first of all tried to put on new clothing, you know, they changed their names. And then they changed their names, they got caught because people recognized who was underneath that new clothing. And then they tried ringing the bells with respect to

Channel Lake. And on that issue, Mr. Speaker, once again they lost credibility because they overstepped what people felt was really important.

So, Mr. Speaker, now what they're trying to do is use the emotional aspect of the health care issue and trying to make it override the issue of health.

Mr. Speaker, I was very interested to hear the member from Moosomin propose a premium, a premium on health in his debate. Well, Mr. Speaker, the people in Alberta have got a premium. Mr. Speaker, the people in many parts of the United States where they pay insurance, their own insurance premiums, they have a premium. And nobody should be fooled that this premium would be in the 40 to \$80 range like it used to be back in the '60s. Nobody should be fooled.

Mr. Speaker, the premiums, if we went to a premium system in Saskatchewan, look at Alberta, in the vicinity of \$500 a year, 5 to \$700 a year. And that only pays for a small portion. In the U.S. (United States) where we've gone completely private, people are looking at \$500 a month-plus. I defy anybody to bring me some proof that you can get coverage similar to ours for less than \$500 a month. I defy it.

Mr. Speaker, if you just take a look at our health budget, \$1.7 billion, and work that out for every man, woman, and child, that's about \$1,700 each per year, per year, that's paid through the tax dollar. If you're going to look at premiums and wanting to pay half of that, for every person, for every man, woman, and child, and only had to pay half of it, that would be about \$850 per person; for a family of two, \$1,700 a year; for a family of four — doubled, \$3,400 a year, if you only had to pay half of it, Mr. Speaker, if you only had to pay half of it.

So I'm rather surprised that the Conservatives continue on their track of wanting to go into this premium system. I'm rather surprised about that. I'm also surprised at the member from Saltcoats, in his delivery when he talked about the need for kidney transplants, was not aware that you just don't have kidney transplants done in any hospital. You have to have a cadre of specialists; you have to have the equipment.

And when you've got both, as Regina will have as we move to consolidation, as Saskatoon has as they rationalize their system . . . I don't think we'd be able to do a kidney transplant in Prince Albert, we're simply not big enough, Mr. Speaker. But you have to proceed on in the direction of consolidating your services in order to get better services and more services, Mr. Speaker.

I want to mention one other thing here, Mr. Speaker, before I take my place. In this motion the members ask for a monitoring and a review of the system. They want to review the system, the health system. Apparently, Mr. Speaker, they are unaware that our health system is under a constant monitoring and a review. Apparently they're not aware of that.

This government has determined that health is too important not to have this kind of activity going on continually. For example, Mr. Speaker, we have yearly audits, both private and by the Provincial Auditor, of this system's financial accountability and performance.

And every year each district prepares an annual district health plan, and it reviews its activities of the past year and it outlines the future plans.

And each district, Mr. Speaker, each district is required by The Health Districts Act to hold at least two public meetings. Mr. Speaker, I submit that what the members opposite would do would be review this with the option, with the idea, of privatizing health. And that should never, ever be allowed to happen here in Saskatchewan.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to once again mention just one thing about what . . . couple of facts about the Plains Health Centre. I want it to be known that this is a fact, that the Regina district's target for acute health bed hospital — hospital beds, pardon me — has been and will continue to be 675 beds. And on the average last year, 608 of these were occupied, on the average. That provides much more than 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker, much more than 10 per cent leeway in the case of some disaster.

(1645)

I want to advise that the transfer, according to the hospital board, of services will begin this summer and will be complete by October 31, '98 with absolutely no disruption in service. And that the plan does include new signs, advertisements, access maps, videos, direct mail, increased parking — expanded parking, up to 992 spaces more than the 901 that are available now.

So in order to put this motion . . . and to state succinctly, Mr. Speaker, what position it is that I am taking with respect to this motion, I now propose to move an amendment to the motion, seconded by the member from Battleford-Cut Knife, and the amendment would read as such:

That all the words after the word "Assembly" be deleted and the following substituted therefor:

. . . support the government for implementing and continuing its approach of an ongoing review and monitoring of the community-based health system in the six years that have passed since this major health reform initiative; and because the health system is too important to the people of Saskatchewan not to undertake these activities continuously, that this Assembly further urge the government to ensure that the system continues to undergo ongoing monitoring and review, including:

yearly audits (private and Provincial Auditor) of the system's financial accountability and performance;

yearly health district preparation of annual health plans, including reviews of activities in the past year and outlining future plans;

regular health district board meetings as required by The Health Districts Act, which must include a review of past performance and future plans, thereby providing an ongoing mechanism for the public to be involved in a district service evaluation and planning;

ongoing evaluation of key utilization and performance issues in the health system by the Health Services Utilization and Research Commission established when health renewal began, which has led to real and measurable changes in how this system uses resources and provides services such as thyroid testing, ECGs (electrocardiogram), hospital acuity, and home care.

I do so move.

Ms. Murrell: — Mr. Speaker, I am a baby boomer and baby boomers will relate to being a child in the late '40s and early '50s and the changes we've experienced in our lives and in our health care.

As a child, if you had a sore throat, the doctor removed your tonsils; if you had a side ache, your appendix was removed; and if you broke your leg, you wore a plaster cast until you no longer could remove the itch with a knitting needle.

Now in the 1990s, thanks to modern surgery techniques, we can have a hip or a knee replaced so that we and our parents can remain in our homes living productive, quality lives. We can have a heart, a lung, and a liver transplant. At one time doctors relied on X-rays to diagnose symptoms. Now thanks to modern technology, there are specialized services such as CAT scans, MRIs, renal dialysis, and nuclear medicine.

Mr. Speaker, on March 19 the Minister of Health announced an additional \$2.8 million to support specialized, hospitalized services so that Saskatchewan residents and physicians would benefit.

New cancer treatment is available in Saskatchewan. Cancer patients with Hodgkin's disease will be able to receive life-saving blood stem cell transplants. There will be improved access to renal dialysis through satellite sites which will be established in Tisdale and Yorkton.

We have also committed \$40 million to SHIN, Saskatchewan Health Information Network, computerized technology that will also benefit Saskatchewan people regardless of where they live.

In order to attract or/and keep doctors in rural Saskatchewan the emergency coverage and weekend relief programs have been developed. These programs recognize the demands on rural general practitioners to provide emergency coverage.

Mr. Speaker, we are focusing on wellness with programs addressing seniors' needs, children's needs, and community needs. Funding is targeted for community health initiatives focusing on early childhood development and youth at risk. The family health benefits program provides supplementary health benefits for lower income families.

The Saskatchewan home care program provides supportive, palliative, and acute care replacement services to help people remain independently at home — services that include nursing, assessment and care coordination, homemaking, home management, personal and respite care, Meals on Wheels, and volunteer coordination.

Saskatchewan has a sparse population. The sparsity creates a

challenge for health care. The emergency response program, which includes the first responder program, is receiving additional funding to provide services to this group of citizens. Funding is being provided to improve emergency response, including expansion of first responder programs challenged in travel distance and sparse populations, including the North.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing in quality health services in Saskatchewan. Services that include prevention of illness and injuries, as well as treatment. Services that are provided at home or in the community, where people want them and need them and are based on health needs. Services are there when needed, as close to home as possible.

To ensure this, district health boards, in consultation with their residents, make decisions about the best services and facilities to meet the residents' needs. These boards are to be commended for their contribution to our communities. Their initiatives are addressing our concerns.

I would like to acknowledge the Greenhead, Midwest, and Prairie West health districts whose initiatives, Partners in Communication, received the first ever green ribbon award on Monday, March 23 from the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations.

This initiative is a new strategy for delivering speech and language services to preschool children, supports home based programing, and is funded by the three districts with support from community services organized.

Although I represent the constituency of Battleford-Cut Knife, I understand the concerns of the area regarding the Plains. My area has had hospitals closed, but our immediate needs are being provided for by wellness centres, and the hospital services are getting better. By consolidating specialized services in one location, equipment can be upgraded and used efficiently. It is also a better use of specialists' time, so that more people will benefit.

Numerous reasons have been given for the closure or the non-closure of the Plains. Despite two major studies that show the Plains should close, that no beds will be lost due to consolidation with the General and Pasqua, and that services offered at the Pasqua and General will provide even better care to the patients, despite all this, people resist changes. And I have been one of those to resist.

Change threatens the things we hold dear — our universal health care for one. So we resist change because we want to protect the progress we've made. However change is real; it's happening, and people know it. So any political party that pretends things can go back to the way they were is dooming itself to irrelevance, if not extinction.

So we hear the mayor of Estevan wanting to go back to how things were in the '80s. And we hear the members opposite wanting to go back to the '80s. No one in Saskatchewan, other than perhaps the members opposite, want to go back to the Devine years which were anything but divine, leaving a legacy of crippling debt which threatens the progress we have made.

When the hospital services are consolidated at two sites, the

Pasqua and the General, you will see that there are no loss of beds, there are no loss of services, but there will be enhanced services which will serve each and every one of us. There will always be challenges, there will always be changes, but there will also always be solutions.

I am confident that this government will continue its commitment to health care. Therefore I do not support the motion but I am pleased to second the amendment. I now close debate . . .

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to enter this debate today for a couple of reasons. One was that, as the member from Moosomin stated and as their platform states, they want to do a wide-ranging public review of the changes that have occurred in Saskatchewan's health system.

The member from Prince Albert covered that very well, Mr. Speaker. He says we have yearly audits, private and provincial auditors that do that. Every year each district prepares an annual district health plan. Perhaps the members could go to their district health meetings and get these.

Each district is required by The Health Districts Act to hold at least two public meetings, one of which must include a review of the past performance and future plans, and the HSURC (Health Services Utilization and Research Commission) or health services utilization committee does our services every year, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that they're being utilized to their ability.

But one of the important things is the Plains Health Centre, and why I get letters on it too, Mr. Speaker . . . in fact the letter in the paper the other day, what was the main reason? His number one reason was accessibility. And these people have mentioned the ambulance drivers a number of times. Well I have more faith in the ambulance drivers than obviously they do, Mr. Speaker, because I feel that the ambulance driver will find the emergency room no matter where it is in this city. Whether he's coming from Moosomin or whether he's coming from Swift Current or whether he's coming from Estevan. I think that those ambulance drivers know their way around this town, Mr. Speaker.

And they complain about the emergency rooms, Mr. Speaker, being full. Have they once mentioned that after the remodelling there will be more emergency rooms than there is now? No. Did they mention that? Not once. Not once did they mention that.

And did they mention the beds? They say no, there's going to be bed closures, but the Regina District's health target for acute care hospital beds has been 675 in Regina. After the Plains closure there will be just as many beds, Mr. Speaker, the same number of beds.

And what's another fact, Mr. Speaker? On an average day last year 608 of those beds were occupied. That leaves us an extra 60 beds, an extra 60 beds free that aren't occupied, Mr. Speaker. All the services at the Plains will be continued to be provided by the Regina Health District at either the Regina General Hospital or the Pasqua Hospital.

Do they mention that? No, they say there's going to be cuts in

services. But there are not, Mr. Speaker, there's going to be more services. They mentioned there's going to be an MRI in Regina, there's going to be a CAT scan in Regina, but they want to keep the Plains open and not have those services in Regina.

So I don't know where they're going, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Good point. He brings up the Howard Johnson incident. The lady as I hear it, discharged herself from the hospital, Mr. Speaker, and they're claiming that she was kicked out. People don't discharge themselves, Mr. Speaker.

Those people are making fearmongering out of this. That lady was discharged by herself and went to the Plains hospital . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You guys didn't check that.

And the other issue I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, is the parking because it's also an issue at the Plains. People say it's easy to go — 992 spaces after the remodelling, Mr. Speaker, more than there is now. And I now move adjournment of debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. With the applause that was . . . the noise in the House I was not able to hear the final remarks of the hon. member for Estevan.

Mr. Ward: — I now move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

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